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DEVOTIONAL  
GUIDES.

BY REV. ROBERT PHILIP,

OF MABERLY CHAPEL.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY REV. ALBERT BARNES. D.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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## INTRODUCTION.

FEW religious writings of the present age have been more acceptable to the Christian public, or more useful, than those of the Rev. ROBERT PHILIP. His small treatises on "Manly Piety," &c., which have been recently collected and published under the head of "The Young Man's Closet Library," have already been extensively circulated in England, and in this country. The treatises which compose this volume have been hitherto separately issued under the name of "Guides," and have been not less successful than the former. Probably they are adapted to be more generally useful, from the fact that they will be likely to find more readers. They are exclusively addressed to Christians; and they so obviously meet the wants of Christians under various circumstances of life, that, even were the execution less able, they could scarcely fail of being highly appreciated by large numbers of the Christian community.

The happy thought seems to have occurred to the mind of the Author to issue a succession of *small* books, similar in their character and tendency, that should be adapted to comfort the hearts, relieve the perplexities, and promote the spiritual advancement of Christians.

A single glance at the different subjects discussed in these "Guides," will show that Christians of almost every class have been contemplated; and that the Author has adapted his works to cases that were most likely to occur, and has selected topics that would be most likely to be useful. The subjects of "Christian Experience," of "Communion with God;" of "Redemption;" the "Guides to the Thoughtful," the "Doubting," the "Conscientious," comprise a large portion of the points that are interesting to the mass of Christians; and evidently embrace the vital portions of the subjects on which a man is interested who desires to "walk with God."

These subjects are treated in a way that will be satisfactory to all serious minds. The character of the Author's style is evidently fitted to the work which he has undertaken. It is simple, pure, terse, intelligible, occasionally highly beautiful and forcible. It is without affectation, laboured effort, or heaviness. It is sufficiently sprightly for the subject; yet never light, or trifling. It is evidently the style of a man who has much communion with the Sacred Scriptures, and with his own heart. The strain of remark is evidently in accordance with the Bible, and with the dictates of sound and sensible thinking. There is little direct reference to *doctrinal* subjects, yet, every attentive *reader* will be satisfied that his views are such as accord with the word of God. He will be constantly impressed with the aim of the Author to lead on his *readers* to a deep sense of their responsibility, and to avoid the evils of Antinomianism. As specimens of great beauty and tenderness of composition, the chapter on the "Saviour's Devotional Habits," or the treatise on "Communion with God," may be referred to; and also many parts of the treatise on "Redemption," or "The New Song in Heaven."

A large portion of these "Guides," is occupied in various forms with Christian experience. In regard to this important subject, the following remarks may be made, as perhaps not an unsuitable introduction to these treatises:—

I. The great principles of Christian experience are substantially the same at all times, and in all countries where the gospel effects the hearts of men. Paul, and Peter, and the martyrs, experienced substantially the same changes when they became Christians which occur now. There were substantially the same views of sin, of the corruption of the human heart, of the mercy of God, of the work of Jesus Christ, and of the operation of the Holy Spirit. There was substantially also, the same joy on the views of the mercy of God, and on the forgiveness of sins, and the same desire to glorify the name of God. It is this, in part, which renders the Scriptures so valuable to Christians. They find there the same great features of Christian experience which they are conscious of in their own bosoms, and they infer, therefore, that they are united by faith to the same Saviour by whose merits the saints of ancient times were saved.

The same is true of Christians of all ages, and all countries. Though living in different times, and speaking different languages, and subjected to different trials, yet the great features of their piety are essentially the same. The humblest convert at a missionary station has communion of feeling with the most refined and intelligent Christian of civilized lands, and would speak a language on the subject of vital piety which would meet with a response in every Christian bosom. It follows from this, that works on the characteristic traits of a Christian, and on the general subject of Christian experience, becomes the property of the world, and of

all times. They become the permanent inheritance of the church; and if they are true to nature they may be as undying as the existence of the church itself. The Bible, apart from the direct evidence of its divine origin, has thus a hold on the human mind which will secure its perpetuity on earth just as long as the church is continued. It describes Christian feeling, as well as the operations of human depravity, in such a manner that every successive Christian feels and knows that it is true to nature. He cannot be mistaken in regard to it. He may be assailed, and ridiculed; he may be unable to answer the cavils of its foes; he may be put to silence by its enemies, but he can no more doubt that the sacred writers understood the workings of the human mind when under the influence of religion than he can his own existence; and the consequence is, that from age to age there are thousands of Christians who are not only willing to venture their everlasting all on the truth of the Bible, but who would be willing to put their faith to a more direct test by going to the stake or the flames. In like manner there are treatises in all languages, and Christian countries, which become the property of the church at large, and which are probably destined to travel down amidst all revolutions to the Judgment-day. The work of Thomas à Kempis on "the Imitation of Christ," is probably such a work. It had no more applicability to his times, in its main structure, than to these times, and to future ages. The "Saint's Everlasting Rest," is probably another such work; and the "Pilgrim's Progress," is *destined* to a similar immortality. And to mention no other, it is probable that "Edwards on the Affections," is *destined* in like manner to become the property of the church at large, and to guide tens of thousands of future inquirers into the knowledge of their real standing in the sight of God.

II. But although this is true in regard to the *principles* of Christian piety, and of the works which assert and defend those principles, it is also true that the Christians of every age demand books adapted to their peculiar character, temptation, trials and wants. While the great principles of piety remain every where the same, and the mental operations in religion in all times and places must substantially coincide, it is also true that "there are diversities of operations, though the same God worketh all in all." 1 Cor. xii. 6. At one time a class of errors may prevail in the church, which may somewhat modify the mental operations of Christians. At another, peculiar forms of temptation may assail them which may require special caution and guarding in regard to some points of Christian character. At another, some form of allurements, or fascination may prevail in the world that shall tend to ensnare Christians themselves, and lead them from the path of duty. In one country the national habits or manners may modify the character of piety in the church, and destroy its simplicity and fair proportion. In all these circumstances, books of piety are demanded to meet the peculiar circumstances of each age and people. God usually raises up men, and qualifies them to meet the circumstances of their times, and to dwell especially on those points pertaining to the Christian character which it may be desirable especially to present. It is not true, however, that such writings have, of necessity, an ephemeral existence. They may embody great principles which shall carry them down far beyond the occasion which called them forth; or they may be expressed in such beauty of language, and felicity of illustration, as to make them standard works in other times on the various points of Christian experience. They are, besides, important historical documents of the gen-

eral features of the piety of the times in which they were written, and will convey in the most clear and striking manner the nature of the dangers which assail the piety of the church. To refer to one single illustration. The effect of the French Revolution was to spread the opinions of infidelity extensively among the lower classes in England; and even to threaten to unsettle, in the more elevated ranks of society, the attachment to the principles of Christianity. In this state of things, God was pleased eminently to qualify Mrs. Hannah More to adapt a series of striking and pungent tracts to the lower classes; and to exhibit the principles of Christianity with uncommon purity and elegance of style to the more elevated ranks in the British empire. So well adapted were her talents to her times that she perhaps contributed more than any other individual to arrest the progress of unbelief, and to preserve respect for evangelical Christianity among the great. So well has her task been executed, also, that her works have become connected with the classical glory of the British nation, and will be transmitted to future times, not only as important historical documents in regard to the character of her times, but as embodying the great principles of vital Christianity adapted to every age.

If a judgment may be formed from a perusal of the writings of the Rev. Mr. Philip, it would seem that one of his main purposes was to guard Christians against the evils of Antinomianism—evils which corrupt the church wherever they exist, and which, perhaps more than any other class of errors, destroy its vitality, and annihilate the power of true religion. In England, it is known that these evils have, in former times, extensively existed. In our own land they also abound; and the consequence is every where seen in indifference to vital religion, in self-security, in opposition to revivals, and

in indifference to the efforts which are made for the world's conversion. Whatever tends to check or oppose *these* evils always does good; and whoever, in the slightest degree, is enabled to resist and destroy the spirit of Antinomianism, does not live in vain.

III. There are, in our own times, and in our own land, peculiar forms of evil which affect the purity of the church, and which extensively operate to render the piety of Christians less deep, and pure, and intelligent, and decided, than is required in the New Testament, and by the character of the times. There is a disposition to cherish the hopes of eternal life on slender grounds, and on examination much less thorough, than were demanded in former times. There is an activity, a restlessness, an impatience in this age, which are greatly unfavourable to a profound and thorough, examination of the heart. There is a degree of worldly-mindedness in the church, which tends to divert the attention from spiritual-mindedness, and from the self-denying duties of religion. Christians have become affected with the prevailing *mania* in pursuit of wealth to a degree which perhaps has been unequalled in other ages; and amidst the general anxiety for wealth, and the general activity, they find little time for a close study of the Bible, or for an examination of their own hearts. There is much, as a consequence, that is unsettled, and unfixed in their views of religion itself. It is not looked at calmly, coolly, prayerfully, as it should be. The doctrines of the Bible are in danger of being overlooked; and whatever cannot be turned to *immediate* action and account is regarded as of comparatively little value.

Many other tendencies of these times might be noticed. But these will direct to the general character of all the dangers that threaten the piety of the church in

this age. They arise from the restless, active, busy, unsettled, and disorganizing character of this generation—characteristics which, while they are doing wonders in many respects, in subjecting a continent to the plough, and in elevating valleys, and levelling mountains, to construct canals and railroads, and in rearing, as if by enchantment, towns and cities in all the Western world, are at the same time threatening to undermine the old modes of thinking, and the principles which time had fixed as sure, and the laws on which the national welfare depends, and the religion which alone can give purity and permanency to these institutions themselves.

He accomplishes an important purpose to the generation who prepares books on Christian experience that shall be adapted to meet the evils which threaten the piety of the church. I regard the series of "Guides" here published as adapted, in an eminent manner, to accomplish this purpose. I should regard their extensive circulation as fitted to promote the spirituality of Christians, to make them acquainted with their own hearts, and with the power of the religion which they profess to love; and as an indication of a disposition among Christians to examine deeply the foundations of their piety, and to cultivate communion with God.

ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA, *October 21, 1836.*

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### No. I.

#### THE WORK OF THE LAW UPON THE CONSCIENCE.

“WITHOUT *the* LAW, *sin is dead.*” This is true, both of the Moral Law of Duty and of the Evangelical Law of Faith: for until their authority and spirituality are understood and felt, we do not understand the evil of sin, nor feel the power of it. Like Paul before his conversion, we

are “*alive*, without the law :” not afraid of perishing, nor at all affected by the plagues of our hearts : not seriously displeased with ourselves, nor conscious of the displeasure of God.

It is humiliating to look back on this state of mind. We acted and felt as if there had been no law at all, or as if there had been no more law than we ourselves chose to admit. We obeyed no farther than suited our own inclinations, and no longer than suited our own convenience. And yet, awful infatuation! we were neither afraid nor ashamed. Indeed, we never paused to consider seriously the divine law, or its sanctions ; but judged of *right* and *wrong* by public opinion. The world, not God, was our lawgiver ; and accordingly, when we did not incur blame for others, we suspected none from God ; and when any part of our conduct was condemned by others, we even took for granted that he would judge more charitably and mercifully than our neighbours did. Thus we had scarcely one scriptural idea of the nature or the authority of the Eternal law. Accordingly, whilst thus “without the law,” or without a right sense of its obligations and sanctions, we were quite “alive ;”—both fearless and gay ; neither self-condemned in our own minds, nor aware that God had condemned us. “*Sin*,” also “*was dead*,” whilst we were thus ignorant of the spirituality and strictness of the Divine law. Not, indeed, that sin itself was dead in our hearts : far from it ! But such were our slight views of the evil of sin, that it might have been dead, for any uneasiness or alarm it occasioned within us. It did not pain our hearts nor awaken our consciences : it left us at “ease” even “in Zion,” and threw no cloud on our spirits or our prospects. We looked as safe and smiling as if we had had no sin, or as if sin involved no punishment. Thus sin was virtually dead, whilst we were inattentive to the demands and denunciations of the Divine law.

Nor was this all. Whilst without scriptural views of the holiness and justness of the law, we were not aware of

the power which sin had over us, nor of the strength of our love to it. The evil principles of our hearts did not show all their evil, because we laid no powerful constraint upon them. We had never tried to be very good, and therefore we did not discover that our hearts were very bad. Indeed, we thought better of our *hearts* than of our *lives*. The reason is obvious : we let our hearts have their own way, and allowed them to think and feel as they were inclined. Whatever religious restraints we laid upon our lips or our hands, we imposed none upon our thoughts : they might range and revel as they chose, if they only kept clear of painful and spiritual subjects. It was, therefore, unlikely—indeed impossible—that our hearts should manifest all their enmity to the laws of God, whilst these laws were not applied to them. We did not set them to try to love or fear God : we did not call on them to consider divine and eternal things seriously : we gave them no tasks in devotion, meditation, or self-control. In a word, we did not at all trouble our hearts to be religious ; and therefore they did not trouble us by any great opposition to the few religious duties we performed : but let us have our own way, so long as they had *their* own way. And this was one chief reason why our hopes of final safety kept “*alive*,” whilst we were without the law : we thought well of our hearts, because they offered no marked opposition to the morals or the religion which we attended to. We attended to no more than was barely sufficient to save us from being *called* irreligious ; and, the *pride* of the heart allowed that degree of duty at all times ; and on solemn occasions, a little more : whereas if we had tried to set our hearts to the serious consideration and the spiritual discharge of *all* duty, they would have soon shown that they were “*hearts of stone*.”

This is, indeed, a humiliating review of our former habits of acting and judging ; but it is well both to take it, and to declare it, because the declaration of it may prove useful to others. To ourselves such a retrospect *must* be useful,

were it only to enable us to discern the change which has taken place in our views and feelings on this subject.

Now we can truly say, that however we were alive, or sin dead, whilst we did not allow the law to speak to our consciences, "*when the commandment came, sin revived, and we died.*" Our ill-grounded hopes of heaven, and our good opinion of our own hearts, fell dead before the scriptural fact, that the Eternal law demands and admits nothing short of *perfect* obedience. The solemn denunciation, "*CURSED is he who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them,*" awoke us at once to our guilt and danger; and the declaration, that "*by the deeds of the law, no flesh living shall be justified,*" confounded us. We were thus reduced to a complete dilemma: we saw that we had not kept the law; we felt that we were unable to keep it perfectly; and now we understood that, however well we might keep it in future, the obedience would not atone for our past sins.

We know not what to do, or what to think, when these solemn facts flash upon our minds; they were so unlike all our former opinions. We had, indeed, heard and read them, but they had not struck nor startled us before. How could they? We had never seriously weighed their import, nor suspected their application to ourselves; and now that we saw both, it seemed too late to remedy our mistakes. For what could we do with a law which condemned us for past sins, and would not allow present duty to make up for them? We were willing to reform, and to lead a new life; but what was the use of doing so, if the change could not save our souls? Thus there seemed no encouragement to do better, and no benefit to be derived from it.

Our case now began to wear a hopeless aspect, and would have been held desperate, had not our floating ideas about the mercy of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, kept despair in check. We had never indeed examined, with any care, the nature of divine mercy, or the design of

the Saviour's death; but we took for granted that, of course, they were intended to *help* us in some way, and no way, that we knew of then, seemed so likely as their *making up* for our defects, if we did our best to live well in future. Accordingly, under this hope, we began to reform, and tried to repent. We *determined* to confess, very humbly, all our past sins and shortcomings, and to be very devout in our religious duties. But, lo! to our surprise, our hearts would not *fix* nor *feel*! They wandered in prayer, and wavered in all their pious resolutions—they invented excuses for the neglect of some duties, and soon tired of others. This we had not looked for; but, indeed, calculated that our hearts would follow up all the dictates of our consciences. What was to be done? We determined to *master* this aversion to spiritual things; to force them to be penitent and devotional. But all would not do; they actually became worse, instead of better, the more we tried to subject them to the authority of the Divine law.

Thus it was; "when the commandment came" home to our hearts, demanding sincerity and spirituality, "*sin revived.*"

The principles of the carnal mind flew up in arms when the *power* of godliness attempted to sit down on the throne of the heart. Then our pride objected to the humility, our sloth to the diligence, our passions to the self-denial, and our tempers to the strictness, of true holiness: the whole soul shrunk back from the "yoke" of Christ, or tried to break it; and the real, though secret, language of the heart was, "*we will not have this man to reign over us.*" ♦ Thus we found that our hearts were as unwilling to obey Christ fully as they were unable to keep the law perfectly: and therefore the Gospel (as we understood it then, and as some understand it now) left us as *hopeless* as the law had done. And in this way: how could the Saviour be expected to make up the defects of a *heartless* piety? We felt that our religion was all forced work, and likely to continue to be so; and as our opinion of the work of Christ was, that

he only helped out those who did their best: of course, we had nothing to expect from him, because nothing to give him, now that our hearts seemed to grow worse instead of better. In a word, we could make nothing of the law or Gospel, but despair or discouragement in our own case. The law had condemned us, and it seemed inevitable that the Gospel would do so too.

In this condition—convinced of the importance of personal religion, but feeling it almost impossible to be religious; alive to the value of the soul, but seeing no way of securing its salvation—many are kept on the rack of suspense, and some on the rack of utter despair. And when such distress of soul falls in, as it frequently does, with a nervous frame of body, or a melancholy cast of mind, the suffering is dreadful—indeed *dangerous*; for the tendency of such minds is to indulge hopelessness. Accordingly some do nothing else but “write bitter things” against themselves; setting themselves down as certainly lost beyond redemption, and interpreting all their agonizing feelings into marks of reprobation. Under this horrid persuasion, they give up prayer entirely, and feel inclined to have done with the word of God, and the house of God for ever. Indeed, they would do so, were it not that they cannot abandon either for any length of time. There is some fascination about the means of grace, which draws even the hopeless back to them, in spite of despair, sooner or later. They may say that they look for no good from any means, and that they are sure to find none; but still they do “look again” to the temple of God, and cannot tear themselves finally away from it, nor utterly forget that salvation which seems lost to them. The truth is, despair is not *natural* to the human mind; and therefore, although *fits* of it may be indulged frequently, the intervals of it are often employed in re-examining the grounds of hope, and admitting a “may be,” or “peradventure,” of salvation. The question, “WHO CAN TELL?” occasionally leads away the thoughts from the dark side to the bright side of it, and

fixes them there long enough to brighten them a little. And although it seems, to the soul, almost sinful to admit the faintest ray of hope in its own case, and almost a duty to banish it at once; still it is admitted and retained from time to time, until it gradually leads to the resolution of inquiring more fully into the way of salvation.

Now, when this is the case, and the mind is willing to examine the matter calmly and deliberately, it is well to begin with the example of Paul: for God showed mercy to him, that he might show in him "a pattern of all long-suffering to them who should afterward believe." Besides, as the Law has had the same effect on you which it had on Paul, it certainly is not impossible that the GOSPEL should have the same effect on you that it had on him. Now, you can truly say with him in the former case, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Yes; you are sure that you are dead to all hope of being saved by the law now, and that your hearts are far worse than you could have imagined them to be. Well; how did Paul act and judge, when by the law he became dead to the law? The shock which thus shook his self-righteousness to death, must, you are aware, have been tremendous! Accordingly, "*he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*" But he PRAYED! Yes: neither his guilt nor his misery led him to restrain prayer before God; nor did they prevent him from believing the Gospel when it was preached unto him by Ananias. He gave "all acceptance" to the "saying," as soon as he knew it to be "a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Although he felt himself to be the "chief" of sinners, he did not hesitate to believe in Christ for his own salvation. He believed on Christ, that he might be justified by the faith of Christ: and being justified by faith, he had peace with God. Now this was acting wisely; and thus should all act, whose hopes of salvation by the *works* of the law, have been slain by the *curse* of the law.

If, however, Paul's case be thought too peculiar to argue from—one thing is certain; we have the *same* Gospel, in the Scriptures, which relieved his mind, and became the power of God unto his salvation. Nor is this all: we have also the *command* of God to believe it for our own salvation; and his express assurance, that believing it *will* save us. If, then, all our old hopes are crushed to death by the law, why not embrace the new and better hopes which this glorious gospel sets before us?

“Why not?” some are ready to say, “they are not intended for me: they belong to the penitent; and my heart is hard!—they belong to the humble; and my heart is proud!—they belong to the believing; and I cannot believe!”

Cannot believe! Why? What is it that you cannot believe? Let us see what it really is; and why you cannot believe it: for it may be that it is something not *necessary* to be believed at present; yea, it may be something which is not *your duty* to believe just now. Do not, therefore, fly off from the Gospel by a hasty conclusion that you *cannot* believe it: you do not seem to *understand* it yet; and, therefore, the difficulty of believing it may not be so great as you imagine—at least, not of the same kind as you suppose.

What, then, is it that you cannot believe? Yes! what is it? For there is reason to suspect that it is either something which it is not necessary to *begin* with; or something which ought not to be believed, until “the truth” is believed, with which God has graciously connected the promise of salvation.

The answers to these pointed questions will, of course, vary according to the degree in which those who are interested in them are acquainted with the current opinions and perplexities of serious people. Hence some will say, “Ah! but I cannot believe that Christ died for *me*.” Now, be not startled when I say, “No wonder! for how could you believe what is not *revealed*?” And it is *not* revealed

that he died for you individually. What is revealed is, that he died for sinners; and *that* you do not disbelieve. But you say, "As I cannot regard myself as one of the sinners for whom Christ died, my believing that he died for sinners can do me no good." Why not? Who told you that the belief of this truth could do you no good? Whoever told you so, the Scriptures did not. They say, (whatever you think,) that whosoever believeth Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and the only Saviour, shall never perish, but have eternal life: yea, they warrant every one who cordially believes these facts concerning Christ, to believe also that Christ loved *him*, and gave himself for him.

This meets your case, if you understood it: but you are prepared to start objections which will prove that you do not understand it clearly yet. "Why," you say, "if merely believing that Christ is the Son of God, and the only Saviour, were enough to warrant me to regard myself as a believer, it would follow that I was one even whilst I was *careless*; for even then I believed all this." Not exactly; for you could not have continued careless, if you had really believed it all. However, if you will call your former *opinion* of Christ believing; it was certainly not believing, because God had spoken: for it is evident from your own confessions, that, whilst you were careless, you did not examine the law or the Gospel. If, therefore, your opinions of the person and work of Christ happened to be, upon the whole, scriptural, they were so without your knowledge; for if you never sat down to form them by the word of God, it is not owing to your care that they were at all correct. Besides, you did not believe what you did, on the *Divine* authority; but because others believed it. Be honest: you just believed what you found current in the world; and would have believed what others did, if it had been the very opposite of what it is. Now, however, this *falling in* with public opinion may be called believing, it certainly is not believing God: and therefore ought not to be appealed to in reply to the scriptural fact, that the cor-

dial belief of the Divine testimony concerning the person and work of Christ, is saving faith.

Besides, that testimony is revealed, that it may be believed for the *salvation* of the soul; and, for that purpose, you did not, you could not, believe it, whilst you were careless. How could you? Whilst you were without the law in your conscience, your hopes were alive *without* the Gospel. You felt in no danger of perishing: you took for granted that you were sure of salvation at last, by some means. Whatever, therefore, you believed about Christ then, it was not for salvation. Accordingly, you never thought so, nor at all imagined that your opinions about the Saviour had any connexion with your supposed safety. What you relied on then, was the good you were doing, or intended to do; and not any thing that Christ had done. Indeed, even now you do not see much beneficial connexion between *believing* and salvation;—I mean, you are quite at a loss to comprehend how the belief of the Gospel can secure an interest in the salvation of God. On all these accounts, therefore, it is wrong, and can only increase your perplexity, to call your former opinions about Christ belief. They were like your former opinions about the law—too vague and superficial to affect your heart.

But now, your belief of the Divine law will enable you to understand what it is to believe the Gospel aright, and to see how faith in Christ brings both hope and holiness into the mind. You know and feel that you now believe the law of God: of that you have no doubt; and you are equally convinced that you neither believed nor understood it, whilst you were careless. And were any one to tell you now, that he had often heard you call it a *holy* and *just* law, long before you began to think seriously; and were he to argue from this that you believed it then, you would say at once, “ Ah! these were mere words of course; for I never weighed their meaning: I just called the law what others called it; and if they understood what they said, I did not. If ever I thought of its holiness, it did not convince me that

nothing short of perfect obedience could meet its demands ; and whatever I thought of its justice, I did not believe that I was condemned by it. Now, as this is the truth of God concerning his law, it is self-evident that I did not believe, at that time, His testimony on the subject. Indeed, such was my unbelief then, that I was in reality ‘without the law.’”

Thus you would reply, to any one who attempted to confound your former professions with your present belief of the law. Well ; it is your present belief of it that creates your present fear of perishing, and keeps up the conviction in your mind that you cannot save yourself. Just because you *believe* that the eternal law says that you are “condemned already” for what you have done against it, you are afraid ; and well you may ! But now, the everlasting Gospel declares as plainly what Christ has done to satisfy the law, and to redeem sinners from its curse ; and it is just as true that he died to redeem sinners from its curse, as that you are under its curse. Seeing, therefore, you believe the truth which *condemns*, why not believe the truth which can *save* you ? You need salvation—you wish for it ; and would give worlds to obtain eternal redemption from the curse : well ; it is offered and promised to you, if you will believe in Christ for it ; for “it is of faith, that it might be of grace.”

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## No. II.

### THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT ON THE HEART.

THERE is something so very grand and solemn in the bare idea of being “taught” by the Holy Spirit—“led” by Him—“quicken’d” by Him—“born again” by Him!—that we can hardly wonder that we should feel both afraid and unable, at first, to believe that any change for the

better, which we have experienced under the Gospel, amounts to the work of the Spirit. For to believe this, in our own case, would be to admit that we are really converted to God, and thus already the children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. But some, although no longer what they *were* in heart or habits, are not prepared to draw this conclusion in their own case. Indeed, it is not at once, nor is it often soon, that any one admits "the full assurance of hope" in his own case. It more frequently happens that those who are most renewed in the spirit of their mind, are most afraid to regard themselves as "born again." It is with the serious, in regard to the regeneration of their souls, as with parents, in regard to the recovery of an only child from a dangerous illness: the physician may pronounce it out of danger, and the symptoms of convalescence may be self-evident to every one but them; and they may not actually dispute the general opinion; but having again and again given up their darling, and felt sure that it could not recover, they are afraid of flattering themselves, and 'slow of heart' to believe that any signs, however good, are *proofs* of safety. So it is with those of us who are feelingly alive to the value of our souls, and intent on their salvation: they may be really "passing from death to life;" but we are so afraid of that "death," and so affected by that "life," that we can hardly believe it possible that our souls can escape the former, or obtain the latter. It seems too good news to be true—too bright a hope to be admitted in our own case. Even when we try to admit it, or venture to whisper to ourselves, that surely a divine change is taking place within us, the thought creates such a flow of feeling, and flutter of spirits, that we know not what to think: and, being equally afraid of presuming or despairing, we come to no final determination; but wait to see how the good work will go on.

Now, it is well to be cautious upon such a question as "*the renewing of the Holy Ghost*," for all changes of feeling are not *Divine* changes. Indeed, there is but too much

reason to fear that many conclude too hastily in their own favour, and mistake conviction for conversion. But whilst this melancholy fact should teach us prudence, it should not be allowed to divert us from the question of our own regeneration: that point can be ascertained and settled upon scriptural grounds; and therefore it ought no more to be hushed up, than to be hurried over. We are “born again,” or we are *not*; and, as uncertainty on the point can do no good, it is both our duty and interest to bring the matter to an issue.

Perhaps the best way of doing this is, to reconsider the *necessity* of experiencing the work of the Spirit, in order that we may see clearly the *consequences* of being without the Spirit. “Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” *None of his!* Solemn fact! None of His! Whose, then, is he who has not the Spirit? The law says, “He is my prisoner, and under the curse, whether he believe it or not.” Satan says, “He is my victim, whether he feel it or not.” The world says, “He is my slave, whether he own it or not.” Dreadful condition! If I am not Christ’s, I am under the curse of the Eternal law, and in the power of Satan! And I am not Christ’s, if I am a *stranger* to the work of the Spirit.

The moment we reflect thus, we feel that the question, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost?” is one which should not be left unsettled from year to year, nor even from month to month. Let us, therefore, put it to ourselves, now, and in connexion with the solemn assurance that we are not Christ’s, if we have not experienced something of the work of his Spirit. And if, in this awful connexion, there is some danger of admitting almost any thing to be “the fruits of the Spirit,” rather than admit that we are in the power of Satan, let us pray earnestly that we may not be tempted to self-deception: but, at the same time, let not that danger prevent nor intimidate us from going into the question; for, although a solemn one, it is also a *simple* one, if it be kept close to the word of God, and not mixed

up with the extravagant or extraneous things, which the fancy of some, and the philosophy of others, have heaped around the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, one thing equally simple and certain is, that the office of the Holy Spirit is to *glorify* the Saviour—to exalt and endear him in our estimation. And whatever be the nature or the degree of the Spirit's operations in the mind, the *design* of them is to render Christ "precious" to the soul. If, therefore, the Saviour is become altogether lovely in our estimation, and his atonement altogether dear to us—dear, because of its glory, fulness, freeness, and holy influence—we are not altogether strangers to the work of the Spirit. Nor, if the Saviour is all and all, in all the hope we cherish, is it of any real consequence whether or not the *way* in which he became so to our souls, is the *same* by which others have been led to love him and rely on him. The real question is not, *How* was I brought to the Saviour? but, am I brought to him for pardon and sanctification? Some have been brought suddenly, and others gradually, to the Cross for refuge; some have been driven to it by the terrors of the law, and others drawn by the tenderness of the Lord; some were brought very early in life, and others very late: but as they are all brought to rely on Christ for a holy salvation, the difference of the *time* and *manner* of bringing them does not affect their safety. Neither the time nor the manner of bringing sinners to Christ, but their being *brought* to Christ, is the cause of their salvation. Paul's conversion was sudden and miraculous; Timothy's was gradual, and the effect of an early religious education: but Timothy was as safe as Paul, when like Paul, he laid hold on Christ for eternal life. And if the heart of the Philippian jailer, instead of being as it were *torn* open by terror, had been "opened" as the heart of Lydia was, gently as a rose-bud is unfolded by the sun, the jailer would have found the same welcome at the Cross which she did. In like manner, had Lydia been plunged into despair, as he was at first, it would have

availed her nothing, if she had not, like him, fled to Christ. It was, therefore, not that in which their experience *differed*, but that in which it *agreed*—their reliance on Christ alone, which secured their welcome and safety. Paul understood this ; and, accordingly, he did not reckon Lydia nor Timothy less truly converted to God, than the jailer or himself ; nor did they themselves doubt their own conversion, because the *manner* of it differed from his. In common with all saints, they were glorying only in the Cross of Christ ; and as they knew that to be the only refuge, and a certain refuge to all who fled to it, they kept to it without any reference to the way in which *others* were brought to it.

Now, as there was such a marked and immense difference in the manner of their conversion, similar differences may be expected still ; and, as in their case, without at all invalidating the reality of the conversion itself. For, in our case also, the real question of experience on this point is—Is Christ become all my salvation ? and *not*, Have I felt all the alarm and horror of soul which some have experienced ? For, if I have felt that, whatever it was, which has led me to commit my soul to Christ for salvation, I could have done nothing *more* than this, whatever I had felt. They have done nothing more, who have suffered most : and although, of course, the terrors of conscience led them to commit their souls into the hands of Christ with more promptness and solemnity than I did ; still, if I did it with *sincerity*, my welcome was equally sure ; for, after all, it is the sincerity of faith in Him, and not the strength of *feeling*, which ensures a welcome ; and what has been done deliberately, is quite as likely to be sincere as what is done under alarm. In both cases, it is the sincerity of the application to Christ, which constitutes it *faith* in him.

But some are ready to say, “ Alas ! I am not sure that I was *sincere* in committing my soul to Christ for salvation.” Now, certainly, if you are not sure of your own sincerity.

no one else can prove it to you. The utmost that any one can do to help you on this point, is to show you what sincerity is : and really that seems unnecessary. For if you did not *intend* to be insincere when you applied to the Saviour, and if you do not *wish* to be insincere, nor *design* to be so, why should you suspect your sincerity? No one can be a hypocrite, or a pretender, without designing to be so : and therefore, most certainly you are not so, if you dislike to be so.

Thus far I have confined your attention to the first saving result of the work of the Holy Spirit on the mind—which is to render the Saviour “precious” in our esteem. Lest, however, this view of his work should be too general let us examine the Saviour’s own account of the matter. Now, when he gave a detailed account of the work of the Spirit, he said,

First, “He shall convince the world of sin: of sin, because they believe not on me.” Well, what do you think of UNBELIEF? what is your opinion of it? I do not mean, of its abstract nature; nor do I refer to infidelity, or its twin “wandering star,” Unitarianism; but to the practical unbelief which we manifested whilst we were careless or heartless in religion. Now, what do you think of the time when you lived as if there had been no Saviour, or as if you had been in no want of a Saviour? That was unbelief! What do you think of the temper which inclined you to care nothing about an interest in Christ, and kept you from considering your need of it? That was unbelief! What do you think of those habits and pursuits which were allowed to banish all serious concern about the salvation of your soul? What is your present opinion and feeling, in regard to all this unbelieving treatment of the Saviour? Should you like to renew it, and to return to your old state of mind? No! you are as much shocked at the idea of going back to such feelings and habits, as you are ashamed of having ever felt and acted such a part. Your long and base neglect of the Lamb of God pains and humbles you

whenever you think of it;—it was so unreasonable, unwise, and unkind! You both wonder and weep that you could have lived as if Emmanuel had never died! This sin sits heavier at times, on your conscience, than any other; and makes you feel and confess that the Saviour might justly reject you.

Well, if this be your experience on the subject of unbelief, what is all this but *conviction* of the “sin” of unbelief; and that, too, by the work of the Holy Spirit? For what else could have brought you to judge and feel thus? The seeds of these proper sentiments and feelings were not born with you: they must therefore have been *sown* in your hearts; and, as the hand of nature never contained them, they must have been sown by the hand of the Spirit. For, as Satan would not have led you into this new state of mind, and as the world could not, and you did not lead yourself into it, it must be from God. Yes, from God—however unable you may be to trace its connexion with likely *means*. The means, whatever they were, were but means; and have not produced the same effect upon all who were under the same means as yourself. Besides, if this change in your views and feelings be not, at least, the *beginning* of a Divine change, what would be so? It is self-evident, that no change would be saving, which did not include *shame* and *sorrow* for having neglected the Saviour. Not to be convinced of the sin of unbelief, would falsify any and all other appearances of regeneration. If, therefore, you have experienced that, without which all other experience would be useless, it is certain that you are not altogether without the Spirit.

Nor is this all. You may not have observed it, but, on examination, you will find that all your most solid and solemn convictions of the evil and demerit of sin in general, have been formed or confirmed by what the Spirit has shown you of the Saviour. For it is with the disease of the soul, as with some of the diseases of the body—it is the *remedy* which discovers its real nature and extent. A

man may feel rather unwell, and yet not be alarmed by his symptoms ; but if a judicious physician prescribe, after examining them, a remedy which is known to be resorted to only in *desperate* cases, it is the remedy, not the symptoms as the patient judged of them, that opens his eyes to his danger. He thought himself ill enough to require something ; but when he found that the *last* resource of medical skill was the only thing which could save his life, then his disorder appeared to him in a new light, and awoke all his fears. Now, so it is with the soul : it is the remedy for the guilt and defilement of sin, which shows the evil and danger of sin. We may have a general conviction of both, by observing how God abhors sin, and threatens to punish it ; and we may see, with some clearness and alarm, that we are in some danger from our sins ; and we may feel persuaded that it is necessary to try something to prevent sin from being our ruin : but it is not until we see that "*the blood of Christ*" is the only remedy, that we either understand or feel aright the evil of sin. It is, therefore, chiefly and emphatically by presenting the Lamb slain to the mind, that the Holy Spirit effectually convinces of sin. And this is *conviction* ! For, what a sight it gives us of our case and character ! Yes ; of our *case*, even if our character stand high by comparison. For, as there is only *one* Saviour, and he the incarnate Son of God ; and only *one* way of salvation, and it by faith in the blood of that Son ; what must sin be, seeing that none but Emmanuel could atone for it, and he only by dying for it ! Whatever, therefore, I may think of my character, my case is this—as a sinner, there is nothing between me and hell but the blood of Christ. I may not have done so much evil as some ; but as there is no pardon for any sin but through the Cross, I must be lost, in common with the chief of sinners, unless I obtain the remission of my sins through his blood.

This solemn consideration sends through all the soul the solemn conviction, that sin is an evil which we neither understand clearly nor feel deeply, until we really believe

the divine testimony concerning the *person* and *work* of Christ. Whilst we did not believe on him, that we might be justified by him, our views of the evil and danger of sin were slight and partial; but now that we feel that we must look to the Lamb slain for all our salvation, or perish for ever, we *cannot* think lightly of sin. Well, what is this conviction of sin, but the work of the Holy Spirit in the mind? Yes! the *first* work which he is appointed to by the constitution of the covenant! And yet, even this conviction of sin some are discouraged by, and actually interpret it into a token of Divine *anger*, although it be in itself a token of Divine love, a first-fruit of the Spirit, and a mark of saving *faith* too: for no one could think thus of sin, who did not believe Christ to *be*, and to have *done* what God testifies.

But I will not hurry on this conclusion too fast. It is desirable to meet distinctly the case of those who, by a strange mistake, imagine that their anguish of soul, on account of sin, is inflicted upon them in anger, and arises from God having left them to suffer the consequences of sin. Some have even regarded this anguish as a foretaste of hell on earth. But consider—was it in anger that God let loose upon the Jews, at Pentecost, all the stings of conscience, until they were “cut to the heart;” literally “sawn asunder?” Was it intended as a forerunner of “the worm that dieth not,” when the arrows of the Almighty drank up their spirit? No! they, perhaps, thought so for a time, and during all that part of Peter’s sermon which was like the thunder, the earthquake, and the whirlwind at Horeb; but when “the small still voice” of mercy, through the blood of the Saviour whom they had murdered, broke like the music of heaven on their ears—then they saw, that God wounded only that he might effectually heal them; and cast them down that he might lift them up, for ever. Now, why should it not be so in the case of those who like them, have been, as it were “sawn asunder” by self-condemnation? You are not guiltier than the murderers of the Lord of glory;

and therefore, although that fact gives you no *claim* upon mercy, it proves that your guilt, whatever it is, is not beyond the reach of mercy. Indeed, God could have done nothing better for you, than thus to convict you of sin: for, is it not an *answer* to your own prayers? You have prayed that he would make you sensible of your need of a Saviour, and empty you of self-dependance: and, therefore, whatever you *meant* by this, your convictions of sin form the best answer to your supplications. "The whole" know not "their need of a physician;" and, as God has made you to feel your sickness, the fair interpretation is, that he desires and designs to heal you. Do not, therefore, recklessly or rashly conclude that you are given up, because you are thus given over, for a time, to the terrors of the law, and the stings of conscience. God is thus, for any thing you know to the contrary, bringing you, "through fire and water, to a wealthy place."

Having thus seen that the first work of the Spirit is to convince of sin, and that the experience we have just reviewed is conviction of sin; let us now observe the *second* part of the work of the Spirit, and examine what you have felt of it. "*He shall convince of righteousness, because I go to my Father.*" At the first sight of these words, you may be ready to say, "I am sure that I have experienced nothing of this; for I do not know even what it *means*." Perhaps not; and yet you may be familiar with the sentiment itself, although this mode of expressing it be mysterious to you. In fact, you must not be startled by *words*: for, as you have only begun to acquaint yourself with the Scriptures, it is only what might be expected, if you meet with expressions which are not, at once, plain to you. They are, however, quite plain to those who have considered them longer; and the meaning of this one is not unknown to you, if you understand any thing of the Gospel. Accordingly, I am not all afraid of really discouraging or perplexing you, when I affirm, that if you are not convinced of "righteousness," you "have not the Spirit of Christ;" for,

are you not fully convinced that Christ could not have *gone back* to the Father, if his obedience and death had not wrought out and brought in an “everlasting righteousness?” You are persuaded and sure that God would not have raised him from the dead, nor exalted him to the throne, if he had failed to satisfy law or justice. You therefore regard the resurrection and ascension of the Saviour as *proofs* of the perfection and acceptance of his atonement. Accordingly, were any one to insinuate that he had not magnified the law and satisfied the justice of God, you would appeal with triumph to the fact, that he is now in the midst of the throne, as a lamb that had been slain: and say, that he could not be *there*, if he had not “finished” his mediatorial work here. Well, this is the real and full meaning of the expression, “of righteousness, because I go to my Father.” The Saviour’s return to the bosom of the Father demonstrates that both his person and works were really what he had declared them to be, divine and atoning. Besides, you are persuaded in your inmost soul that nothing but the righteousness of Christ can justify you before God; and that it *can* do so: and accordingly you have adopted the sentiment of Paul, and “count all things but loss, that you may be found not in your own righteousness, but in the righteousness” of Christ. Well, this was a proof in Paul’s case, that he was convinced “of righteousness” by the Spirit: why then should not a similar sentiment prove the same fact in your case? Paul may have understood it better, and felt it more deeply, than you do at present; but if it has withdrawn all your confidence from your own righteousness, and convinced you that nothing can save you but the righteousness of Christ, this is the *substance* of Paul’s experience on the subject.

## No. III.

## THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

IT is as true, that if any man have the Spirit of Christ, *he* is Christ's, as that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his :—" "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God ;"—"and if children then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." It is therefore the *duty* of all who have been "led by the Spirit," to believe *this* in their *own* case, because they are warranted and welcomed to do so, and cannot until they believe it in their own case, experience "the witness" or "the seal" of the Spirit. Indeed "the fruits of the Spirit" will be both few and imperfect until it is believed.

Accordingly, many who can hardly doubt that they have experienced something of the work of the Spirit on their minds, are afraid to regard it as that "good work" which he will "carry on ;" because they do not feel the witness of the Spirit, nor the joy of the Holy Ghost. Hence the question which they put to themselves so often—"How can I think that what I have experienced is the saving work of the Spirit, seeing that I feel nothing of the witness, the seal, or the earnest of the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is *joy* and *peace*, as well as 'temperance and goodness ;' and as I have no joy, and but little peace, it is not likely that all the change which I have undergone is merely the effect of the *common* operations of the Spirit, instead of being the effects of his *special* influences?" Thus many of the truly serious argue in their own case.

In order to clear up this matter, the first thing to be settled, is, evidently, whether the change of views, feelings, and habits, which you have experienced, is a *divine* change. Now it must be either *divine* or *human*. But if you, as a self-condemned and perishing sinner, are looking to Christ alone for a holy salvation ; if you are willing and desirous

to be an entire and eternal debtor to Him, and to be made like Him in heart and character, this change from your former state of mind cannot be a human change, because no human means could produce it. Nothing human ever brought any soul to feel that there was nothing between it and perishing, but the blood of Christ. All the tendencies of nature are against this conviction. Wherever, therefore, it is the conviction of the mind, it is the *special* work of the Holy Spirit. Now, if this be the change of mind which you have undergone, it is, unquestionably, a *divine* change; and, as unquestionably, it is your *duty* to believe it to be so. You may say, "I am afraid to conclude that I have been led by the Spirit:" but if you are come to the word of God for counsel—to the mercy-seat for grace—and to the Cross for all your salvation from sin and hell, none but the Holy Spirit could have led you there. Those are the grand points to which he leads all whom he quickens. This is the very way in which he glorifies the Saviour. Settle it, therefore, in your minds, from this moment, that your reliance on the Lamb slain for a holy salvation, is absolute *proof* of having been "led" by the Holy Spirit. Or, if you still hesitate to admit this in your own case, do ask yourself, and fairly answer the question, Would any thing be proof *without* these sentiments and feelings? Do you not see that nothing would amount to a saving change, if this holy reliance on the Saviour were not in it? It is evidently the *chief* thing in regeneration.

Now, if you can neither deny nor doubt that you have been thus led by the Spirit of God, from the love of sin to the love of salvation, it is your immediate *duty*, as well as privilege, to believe that you are Christ's, and a child of God by Jesus Christ. But here again you fly off from the scriptural conclusion in your own case, and say, "I do not feel myself to be a child of God." But, consider; how can you *feel* yourself to be so, while you do not *believe* that you are so? It is irrational to expect that you could feel what you *disbelieve*. The feeling of sonship must spring

from the belief of your own sonship. No man can have the Spirit of adoption, so as to be fully *aware* of having it, until he believe that he is adopted. Accordingly, it is because believers *are* sons, that God sends forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, "crying, Abba, Father." This seal of the Spirit, like the pentecostal gifts of the Spirit, may not be given at once: it may be delayed much longer than the full inspiration of the Apostles was; but the Spirit of adoption will be sent forth, and, whenever it is so, it will be by enabling believers to believe that they "are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

You may not have observed hitherto, that this is the scriptural way of leading believers into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Indeed, many seem to look for it in another way, and to expect something like a *revelation* of their own adoption and sonship. They do not see, from the Scriptures, that they are the children of God by faith; and, therefore, they take for granted that their knowledge of their own sonship must come from another quarter—even from the *direct* witness of the Spirit with their spirits, that they are born of God. Accordingly, for this direct witness, they are praying, and waiting, and hoping. Thus many have been judging and acting for years. They know that until they are the children of God, they are not "heirs of God," nor "joint heirs with Christ;" and as might be expected, they are often cast down because they obtain no clear sense of their own sonship. The witness which they look for, and pray for, does not come; and therefore they imagine that it is withheld in sovereignty, or kept back until they shall acquire more of the *marks* of adoption. And, as they see in themselves many causes why God should *not* answer their prayers for the witness of the Spirit, they try to be content without it for a time.

Now it is no mistake, that the Holy Spirit will *not* witness to the sonship of any child of God, who is living in the indulgence of any *known* sin; it is no mistake that the witness of the Spirit is only given in answer to *prayer*; it is

no mistake that there is a *direct* witness of the Spirit.  
“*These are the true sayings of God!*”

But still there is a mistake ; and it lies in supposing that the direct witness of the Spirit is something *different* from the direct witness of the Word. It is also a mistake to suppose, that the Holy Spirit either will or can witness to our sonship, before our *own* spirit witness to our having really believed on Christ for salvation. Neither the Spirit of God, nor the Word of God, bears any witness to our adoption, until our own spirit is conscious of *faith* in Christ.

It is by leaving the question of personal faith unsettled, that so many both miss and mistake the witness of the Spirit. They allow it to remain doubtful to themselves, or are afraid to decide, whether their own believing in Christ is *saving* faith or not. They wish it to be so—pray that it may be so—and cherish a faint hope that it may prove to be so in the end ; but at present, they do not venture to regard their own believing as real faith. Their own spirit does not bear them witness that it is so.

Now, while this continues to be the case, they must search their own hearts in vain for that witness, or for the peculiar fruits of the Spirit ; for these are peculiar to believers. Until, therefore, your own spirit witness that you are a believer, the Spirit of God will not, cannot witness that you are a child of God ; you must not, therefore, shrink from going fully into the question of your own faith.

It is, indeed, a solemn one, and not easily settled, owing to the many controversies which exist on the subject of faith ; but still it may be settled, and therefore it should not be left unsettled, especially as you can make no progress towards joy or peace until you know yourself to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore, go into the question calmly and seriously.

Now your own spirit, although it does not bear you witness that you are really a believer, witnesses *something* on the subject of salvation by the blood of Christ. It bears you witness that you are no longer indifferent about this

way of salvation, nor seeking to be saved in any other way. It is even the persuasion of your spirit that there is no other way. You feel also in your inmost soul, that unless you obtain an interest in Christ, you must perish; and whatever you may think of his *willingness* to save you, your whole spirit is fully persuaded that Jesus is *able* to save you. So far your own spirit witnesses without hesitation or reserve. Well; so far you are evidently not an *unbeliever*. All this is not *all* the truth concerning either the person or the work of Christ; but it is *some* of it. It is, at least, the hearty belief of this part of the Gospel—that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus. It is also the hearty belief, that Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto him. It is also the hearty belief, that by the works of the law, no flesh living can be justified. All these things are the living and settled convictions of your mind, as well as the express words of God; and, knowing that you did not always believe these things fully, you are almost persuaded that your strong conviction of their truth is from the work of the Holy Spirit on the mind.

You do, then, accede to all this, as being the witness of your own spirit? Well; that witness is *proof* that, thus far, you are not an unbeliever. Let this, then, be a *settled* point. And now, carry the inquiry farther into the witness of your own spirit. Does your mind or conscience charge you with *disbelieving* any part of the divine testimony concerning the person or the work of Christ? The substance of that testimony is, that Christ is God manifested in the flesh, as a sacrifice for sin. Now, if you disbelieve this, it is a matter of no consequence what else you believe. It is not, however, disbelief of it, to be unable to comprehend it fully. It is the great mystery of godliness, and therefore faith has to do with the *fact*, not with the nature of the union of divinity and humanity, in the person of the Saviour. What, then, is the witness of your spirit to this fact; if you are conscious that you believe it, on the

authority of God, to be the fact, thus far also you are evidently not an *unbeliever*; for what *more* could you, or indeed any one, do with it, than to believe it to be the truth of God? Perhaps you are ready to say, that you never *doubted* the divinity or the atonement of the Saviour; and that, as you believe no more now than what you did while you were careless, you cannot reckon your present believing real faith. Well; what do you reckon it? UNBELIEF? It certainly is not *that*, if words have any meaning. It may be weak faith, but it cannot be unbelief, if it embrace the truths which you say it does. And as to your having believed while careless, all that you do now, it is unreasonable and unwise to think so for a moment. It was not believing with the heart, nor the purpose for which the Son of God became incarnate, and was crucified; and therefore it was the worst kind of unbelief. Whereas, if you now rest all your hope of salvation upon the atonement, because you believe that the divinity of Christ rendered his death a glorious atonement; this is faith. Words have no meaning, if this be not faith. You might as well call light darkness, as consider this unbelief. You are *not* an unbeliever, if your spirit bear you witness that you embrace whatever God has testified concerning the person and work of his Son.

You are now, if you regard this grand point as settled in your own case, in the direct way to obtain the witness of the Spirit to your own adoption. And the first thing you want in order to this is, to be enabled to see and believe the connexion there is between faith in Christ, and your being a child of God. Now, faith and sonship are inseparably connected in the word of God. Hence the express declaration concerning Christ and believers: "Unto as many as received him, gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name:" that is, they are empowered, or warranted, to regard themselves as the children of God. Accordingly, when Paul found the Galatian believers doubting, or misunderstanding this warrant, he said, "Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus."

Now, it is to the truth of this gracious connexion between faith and sonship, that the Holy Spirit witnesses ; and the chief part of his witness is, to show that it is true in our own case. Indeed, the *whole* of his witness consists in filling, affecting, and influencing our spirit with the sweet persuasion, that it is "the truth of God," that we are *warranted* to believe ourselves the children of God, because all our faith is in the Son of God. This persuasion may vary, from time to time, in its fulness, clearness, and sweetness ; but, even when strongest, its true glory is, that it is *true* that we are the children of God by faith. The witness of the Spirit is not, therefore, different from what the word of God witnesses on this point ; but the same. He shows nothing to our spirit but just what God has said in the Scriptures, and bears nothing in on the mind but just what is "written." His witness comes, indeed, with a power and glory at times, which makes the written truth appear newly revealed truth, or something which the believer had never heard, read, or thought of before ! The new force given to the old truth is sometimes such, that even wise and good men have almost forgotten, at the moment, the word of God, and thought only of the direct witness of the Spirit with their spirits. And, in such cases, there was a direct witness : all the melting, cheering, and holy influence of the Word on their minds was the effect of *divine* influence ; but still it was divine influence, working by the divine word, or the Spirit showing clearly and powerfully what had been overlooked or misunderstood before. No *new* truth, but the *glory* of the old, was brought home with demonstration and power ; for even when the witness of the Holy Spirit goes farthest in sweetness and glory, it does not go one hair's-breadth beyond, or away from, what is already revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

And it is self-evident that nothing more can be wanted, either for comfort or establishment. What more could you wish, than to know that you *are*, what you desire to be—a

child of God? If, therefore, that be already revealed in the Scriptures, the first thing you really need, in this matter, is an increase of faith to believe the fact. Now, it is expressly revealed, that "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" and that as many as "receive" Christ, or believe on him, are empowered to believe also that they are "become the sons of God." Whenever, therefore, you understand and believe this, in your own case, you will have the witness of the Spirit; for this is the truth of God; and it is to "the truth," that the Spirit witnesses. "But," you are ready to say, "if the sonship or adoption of believers is revealed already in the Scriptures, what need is there for another witness to it? If I can learn, from the Word of God, that I am a child of God, is not the witness of the Spirit unnecessary?" Now, in *your* case, it is evidently very necessary; for you have *not* learned, hitherto, that your "faith hath saved you." You hardly believe this now. You are, perhaps, not yet sure that your believing on Christ is saving faith. There is still a *mist* around the whole subject, as regards yourself. It is, indeed, breaking upon you, and brightening up here and there; but you are almost as much afraid of the light as you are of the darkness. How can you, then, suspect that the testimony of the Word should set aside the witness of the Spirit? You have often heard and read the *written* testimony of God, that believers are all his children by faith; but hitherto, you have not ventured to believe this fact in your own case, and can hardly venture to do so now. It is, therefore, self-evident that instead of doing away with, or lessening the need of the Spirit's witness, the necessity of it is demonstrated by the very difficulty which you feel in trying to believe this part of the Gospel for yourself. Never, perhaps, did you feel more deeply than at this moment, your own need of being led by the Spirit unto all truth.

"True," you say, "but surely the witness of the Spirit is something more spiritual than all this: I have always

thought that it consisted in a peculiar divine impression on the mind, or a peculiar manifestation to the soul." Well, is it not a *divine* impression, and manifestation too, when the mind feels persuaded of the worth and all-sufficiency of the Saviour; and of the truth of the great scriptural fact, that salvation is by faith alone, that it may be of grace entirely? The *natural* impression is, that salvation is by works alone, or by the fruits of faith, rather than by faith itself. If, therefore, you think lightly of feeling persuaded that you must be saved by faith, or perish, you underrate the value of your own convictions: for this conviction, if connected with love to holiness, is the best part and proof of the work of the Holy Spirit on your mind; and, in fact, is the beginning of his witness too.

But still you are not satisfied on this point: but feel almost sure that the witness of the Spirit must be a more peculiar impression, or manifestation, than grace to believe all the truth. Well: an impression of *what*? A manifestation of *what*? There is nothing to impress or manifest but *revealed* truth; and as that *is* revealed which you want to know, the only thing you require, in order to enjoy the comfort of it, is grace to understand and believe it for yourself. For do you not see that any impression of what is not revealed could never be relied on, because it could never be proved to be a *divine* impression? The manifestation of any thing to the soul, different from, or additional to, the Word of God, could, indeed, come only from a wicked spirit. It is, therefore, evidently *wrong* to look for any divine witness, but what the Spirit of God bears to the truth of the divine word, and its correspondent influence on our hearts and habits.

## No. IV.

## THE SPECIAL FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT.

“THE *fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness.*” It does not, however, follow from this, that all goodness is “the fruit of the Spirit.” All *real* goodness of heart and character is so, of course; but there is much apparent and comparative goodness, which is merely the fruit of education and self-righteousness. Hence the importance of distinguishing between the fruits of the Spirit and the fruits of nature; for these, like some of the fruits of the earth, are occasionally similar in *appearance*, whilst, in reality, they are as different as food and poison. Comparatively, there are many who are good neighbours, good parents, and good children: but their goodness, in these social relations, flows from no love to God, nor from any regard to the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, they do not pretend to be influenced by the Spirit or Word of God in the goodness which they cultivate; it is merely their *way*—their *rule*—their family *system* of acting. This is both the history and mystery of all their comparative goodness.

Now, whatever such goodness be, it certainly is not *religion*; for God is not made its author nor its end. It is not derived from his grace, nor directed to his glory; and, therefore, cannot be satisfactory to him, however beneficial it may be to society. No wonder: we ourselves would not be satisfied with any goodness in our children, if it were unconnected with love to ourselves as their parents. Did they neglect, avoid, and forget us, we should regard them as *bad* children, however good they were to others, and in other respects. And nothing ought to be held real goodness in a child, when filial love and gratitude are wanting. Much more, therefore, may God, so far as it regards himself, disown all moral goodness, which begins, and goes on, without either love or gratitude to himself.

Nor is this all. There is also a kind of love and grati-

tude to God, which does not mend the matter very much. I mean when they refer to Him chiefly as the God of *providence*. Many mistake for religious principle, the pleasure they feel in their worldly lot. They have succeeded in business beyond their own expectations, and better than many who had more to begin with. Providence has smiled on their industry, and kept watch and ward over their interests. Accordingly, they see, and feel, and confess, that God has been very good to them. On this ground, they feel it to be their duty to cultivate some goodness, and to do some good, in grateful return for the divine goodness to themselves. Now, perhaps, no natural goodness approaches so near to "the fruit of the Spirit" as this. It is amiable, considerate, and highly consistent with a sense of moral obligation. But, after all, it is often no better than self-righteousness, and sometimes it is mere ostentation; and even when it is *none* of these, it may not be the fruit of the Spirit. Accordingly, many who go all this length in goodness, do not even pretend that they are in the least influenced by the Holy Spirit in any good they do. The utmost they say or think is, "We bless God that we have a heart to do what little good we can in the world." Here the matter begins and ends. They have no *heart* for prayer; no deep sense of their lost condition as sinners; no clear understanding of the way of salvation by the blood of Christ; no settled persuasion of their own need of "a new heart;" and, therefore, neither their general goodness nor gratitude is "the fruit of the Spirit." For the first fruits of the Spirit are convictions of sin and righteousness; or, the drawing away of the soul from sin and self-dependance, to take up with the cross and holiness. Accordingly, where there is no solicitude to be saved by the blood of the Lamb, there is none of *that* morality which is the fruit of the Spirit.

The truth of these distinctions is both illustrated and confirmed by the *order* in which the fruits of the Spirit are classed in the Word of God. "Love, joy, peace," are placed first in the catalogue; and the moral virtues next.

Not that "long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance," are less the fruit of the Spirit than "love, joy, peace;" nor because they are less necessary; but because the moral virtues may be *imitated* without the Spirit, whereas the spiritual graces cannot. Any man may force himself to be temperate; but no man can force himself to *love* God or the Lamb. A man may be constitutionally meek and gentle; but no man loves God, nor rejoices in God, nor has peace with God, naturally. Accordingly, many of the truly serious, who are cultivating all the moral virtues, and who excel in some of them, regard themselves as almost strangers to both the work and witness of the Spirit, because they feel so little love, joy, or peace, in believing. They see, in the case of the primitive believers, that faith wrought by love, and produced joy and peace; and as their own believing does not work in this way, they dare not regard it as that faith which is from the operation of the Holy Ghost. This, however, is a grand mistake, if all their reliance is on Christ for a holy salvation. That is, "the faith of God's elect;" and the only reason why it does not lead to "love, joy, peace," is, that such persons do not understand that their "faith hath saved them;" for if they understood and believed that it *had* saved them, they could not be long strangers to love, joy, or peace. And even as it is with them, they are not utter strangers, nor so much strangers to these fruits of the Spirit as they themselves suspect and say.

I appeal to you who have applied to Christ for a holy salvation, and are relying on him alone for eternal life: you say, that you feel little or no *love* to God and the Lamb. Do you mean by that, that you feel more *hatred* than love to them? No: you are not conscious of any hatred to them. The bare idea of such a thing shocks you. Well, is there *no* love in this feeling? You are ready to say—"the absence of all hatred does not imply love; we hate no one, but we do not love all alike." True, you have not the same *reason* for loving all alike; and therefore you have no

desire to do so: but you really love all whom you *desire* to love. Now, if you really *desire* to love God and the Lamb, it is certain that you are not even *indifferent* to them, far less hostile to them. There is not an utter want of love, where there is a *wish* to love. Love is, indeed, weak when it consists chiefly in wishes; but even then it is not pretence nor fancy. And if the weakness of it be the cause of shame and sorrow to you, the love itself, although certainly feeble, is not *insincere*.

Are you then satisfied, in your own mind, that it is really your desire to love God and the Saviour supremely? Well, love to them must have a *beginning*, as well as every other gracious feeling. None of the graces of the Spirit, nor, indeed of the gifts of nature, spring to maturity at once. The *desire* to love God should, therefore, be welcomed and well treated in the heart: for it is from that *seed* that all love to him springs, and without which none ever will or can spring up in the heart. Besides, are you not conscious of loving God and the Saviour, and their "commandments," more than you once did? And would you not think it a very great change for the *worse*, were you to relapse to your former state of mind? Would you not even *suffer* a good deal, rather than go back to your old sins and insensibility? Weigh these questions seriously, and answer them fairly. I would not flatter you, nor teach you to think too highly of "the day of small things:" but as it is evidently a day of *something* gracious in your case. I must guard you against despising it. Now, it will never do any good, but real evil, to go on for ever questioning the sincerity of your love; for until you admit that it is not insincere, it cannot increase in strength nor in warmth. It is well, it is necessary, to exercise a keen jealousy over our best feelings; but if they are treated with nothing but jealousy and suspicion, they certainly will not grow better. Faith and love must be "watered," as well as watched; cherished, as well as tried:—for if you get into the habit of trying them as *hypocrites*, or only to find *fault* with them, you will never

be able to come to any satisfactory conclusion, nor to succeed in improving them.

Besides the kind and degree of love which you want to feel, you never can feel until you believe that God and the Lamb have loved and do love *you*. It is your doubt of their love to you that keeps down your love to them. This is the real *secret* of all the coldness and weakness you complain of; unless, indeed, some *sin* has still the throne of your heart. Then, indeed, the Holy Ghost will not shed abroad the love of God in your heart. But if this be not the case, what you want, in order to love God more, is to be enabled to believe that God has loved you. Now, why not believe this? You are warranted and welcome to believe this for yourself, if all your faith is in Christ for a holy salvation. And, whatever you may think, you never can *know* that God has loved you, or that Christ "gave himself" for you, but by *believing* it. You may have imagined, hitherto, that the sense or assurance of this, must be borne in upon the mind in some mysterious or supernatural manner; but if by that, you mean in some way *apart* from believing what God has said, you mistake greatly. You must just take God's word for it, if ever you would be sure that he has loved you. Well, you have his word for it:—"The Father himself loveth you," saith Christ, "because ye have loved me;" and you *have* loved Him, if you have committed your souls to him for salvation, and are willing to obey him.

Now, do you not see, at a glance, that the moment the soul admits the sweet persuasion of God's love to itself, it is impossible not to love him? Try it in your own case, if it be merely as an experiment. Suppose that a voice, direct from heaven, assured you that God had "loved you with an everlasting love," and that, therefore, "with loving-kindness he had drawn you" to the Cross and the mercy-seat;—could you hear this assurance without a glowing heart? Would not all your affections warm, and melt, and flow out to God? You feel at once that such knowledge of

*his* love to you, would secure and inflame your love to him for ever! Well; if you are sure that you are a believer, you have this assurance in your Bible: and, therefore, it is just as *true*, as if a voice, direct from the heaven of heavens, were to inform you. Why not believe it, then? This was the apostolic way of growing in love. "We love Him, because he first loved us." How did they *know* that God had loved them? They knew that they had "believed through grace," and that God loved all such; and, therefore, they said, "we have known and believed the love wherewith God hath loved us."

Now, as to the *second* special fruit of the Spirit—"Joy;" however you may have complained, hitherto, that you had *no* joy in believing; and however you may have wondered that your application to the Saviour was not followed by "the joy of salvation;" the cause is obvious. It is not because the Spirit has been sovereignly withheld from you; nor that joy does not follow from believing now, "as in the days of old;" but, evidently and certainly, because you have, hitherto, believed only *one half* of the Gospel. But whilst the belief of that half is enough for safety, the belief of the other also is requisite in order to "joy."

Consider this. The first and chief part of the Gospel is God's testimony concerning the person and work of his Son. With the belief of this testimony, he has graciously and inseparably connected the promise of eternal life. Hence arises a *second* divine testimony; and it is concerning all who have believed the first with the heart. Now, that second testimony, which is thus concerning them, is, that they "*have* eternal life;" that they "*are* the children of God;" that they "*are* justified;" in a word, that they have *obtained* the mercy and favour they were seeking! Now, the moment they believe that they are actual heirs of the salvation they were believing in Christ for, *joy* must come into their hearts; indeed it cannot be kept out; for it is impossible that any man can be joyless, who believes that all his sins are pardoned, and his soul redeemed, by the blood

of Christ. This, then, is that half of the gospel which you have either not observed before, or not ventured to believe in your own case. The consequence has been, that all the joy you had from looking to the Saviour, has been damped and kept down by the chilling suspicion, that he might not save *you*. Sometimes you have got above this fear for a moment, and seen so much of his grace and glory, that you could not doubt his willingness to save even you. You have, then, clasped the dear hope to your heart, and resolved that you would cling to it through life. But how often have you lost your hold of it! It has gone, you know not how. Why? If the neglect of known duty, or the indulgence of known sin, has not been the cause of its withdrawal, the cause is obvious:—you did not see that this fond hope of salvation was fully warranted, and chartered to you, by the express *word* of God. You took up the hope at first, not so much because you felt *warranted* and *welcome*, by that, to do so; but because you were *willing* to do so, and could not be happy without it. Accordingly, whenever you asked yourself the question, “what *right* have I to hope for so great a salvation?”—you could not answer it to your own satisfaction. You looked at yourself—and felt that you had no claim! You looked at others—and felt afraid to hope. But you did *not* look to the things that are “written” unto them “that believe on the name of the son of God,” that they “*might* know” that they “have eternal life.” Had you looked at them, your joy might have been “full.” Let it be so now; for “it is written,” that whosoever believeth shall never perish, but have everlasting life; and you do believe, if you love the Gospel.

All this, I am aware, is easily said. I feel, with you, that it is easier to advise than to act here. Paul evidently felt this, when he said to believers, “Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, rejoice.” This repetition of the injunction, implies that, like ourselves, they did not understand at first, or they forgot at times, the warrant which faith has, in

the divine Word, to "rejoice always." It was, however, a *mistake*, when believers were afraid to rejoice in the Lord: for except when they become remiss, or irregular, they are always warranted to cherish the joy of salvation, as the strength of their heart.

In like manner "PEACE" whilst it is the fruit of the Spirit, is also the effect of faith. It is not a feeling of tranquillity infused into the mind or the conscience, apart from "the truth;" but by the truth. The Word of God is "the seed" of that peace which is the fruit of the Spirit. By overlooking this fact, and by mistaking the real nature of spiritual peace, many perplex and sadly hinder themselves in the divine life. Indeed, they often look for a kind of peace which is not *promised*, and expect it in a way which is not *revealed*. What do you mean when you pray for peace? What would you consider as an answer to this prayer? If you mean by peace, that sweet serenity of soul which you have felt when you have obtained great enlargement of heart in secret devotion, or when you have been, as it were, carried "out of the body" by some glorious sermon, full of the glory of the Saviour; you mistake the matter. This is, indeed, peace; even "the peace of God, which passeth understanding;" but it is that degree of it, which is more the *reward* of extraordinary devotional habits, than the effect of ordinary faith. Tastes of such holy tranquillity are vouchsafed, at times, to some, when they begin to follow the Lamb, that they may be encouraged to follow him fully, and convinced that his ways are peace; but still, it is his *own* peace which he has left to his followers, as their ordinary portion. "Peace I leave unto you: My peace give I unto you."

This was a distinction peculiarly wanted by the first disciples. They were naturally sanguine in their expectations, and prone to picture to themselves bright days and great things. Had, therefore, the Saviour said nothing but "Peace I leave unto you," the probability is, that they would have flattered themselves with a sunny prospect of

ease and tranquillity. How great, then, must have been their disappointment when they had to endure "fears without, and fightings within!" In that case, they might have said, "We looked for peace, and, behold, war." All this was, however, prevented by the qualifying clause, "My peace give I unto you." This defined the legacy, without lessening its real value: for the Saviour's own peace, although it did not exempt him from trials, nor from the temptations of Satan, nor even from the occasional hidings of the Divine presence from his soul; yet it secured both his safety and triumph under them all. Accordingly, *that* kind and degree of peace his Apostles found during their work and warfare.

Now this distinction we have need to notice and remember; for we too are prone to expect what is not promised. It would quite suit our taste and wishes to have no cares, trials, or temptations. We should be delighted if we were never to have an uneasy nor an unholy thought in our minds again. To have our hearts, like Gabriel's harp, always in tune, would be, indeed, heaven on earth, and the very thing we desire! But all this is the *poetry*, not the sober reality, of religion. It is not to be angels, but to be "saints" on the earth, that we are called by God. "A life of faith on the Son of God," is a life of warfare against the lusts of the flesh and of the mind; a life of watching against unbelief and temptation; a life of obedience and submission to the will of God: and the peace which is the fruit of the Spirit, is the persuasion that God is on our side, and will not suffer us to be overcome. This was the Saviour's own peace, when his heart was broken with reproach, and his body agonized with pain, and his soul torn with anguish: and we deceive ourselves, if *we* mean by peace, exemption from trouble of mind or body. Such peace is not promised. The substance of what is promised is, "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*"

Now many who, in their own vague or visionary sense of the word, say that they have no *peace* in believing, are cer-

tainly not strangers to this kind and degree of peace: for they evidently bear their trials well, and resist temptation manfully, because they believe that God has some gracious design in all that he calls them to do or suffer.

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No. V.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

UNTIL this subject is understood, it is impossible for any one, however serious or devotional, to enjoy the witness, or to abound in the fruit, of the Holy Spirit. Now, it is either not clearly understood, or not fully believed, in every case of fear which is not relieved by it. The fear of perishing is utterly incompatible with an intelligent belief of the scriptural fact, that "he who believeth" on Christ "*is justified*," unless indeed, the person who is in fear, is also conscious that he has not faith in the Saviour. In that case, the doctrine of justification by faith cannot, of course, remove his fears; but must, if he understand it, increase, instead of lessen them. Those, however, who are persuaded that they have faith in the Saviour and some love to him, but who are still afraid that they are not justified by his righteousness, are certainly labouring under some mistake; for his righteousness is "*upon* all them that believe." It is, therefore, "*upon* themselves, as a robe of salvation, if they are believers; and they *are* believers who rely upon and love Jesus Christ for his holy salvation. Those who do so, because they are persuaded of the truth of his divinity and atonement, cannot be *unbelievers*, whatever they may suspect or think. This state of mind is utterly unlike unbelief. It is the very reverse of it in fact. It is faith, if it be any thing; for faith is the cordial belief of "the truth" concerning the person and work of Christ. Indeed, if it were not, then it would follow that faith is the belief

of *conjectures*; for unless conjectures, there is nothing but "the truth" to believe; and surely *guesses*, however plausible, should never be preferred to the Word of God, nor even connected with it. Besides, there is no need for any, seeing God has graciously and inseparably connected with the belief of "the truth as it is in Jesus," the promise of justification and eternal life. All things necessary for life and godliness are promised to all who embrace the divine testimony with an honest heart. Whoever, therefore, does so, has no need to perplex himself with conjectures about his own adoption, redemption, or election. He has *been* elected, redeemed and adopted, if he has "believed through grace," and for holy purposes, "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." All who "hold the truth" (except, indeed, those who "hold it in unrighteousness") have no occasion at all to doubt whether the Saviour died for *them*. He both *loved* them, and gave himself *for* them, who receive the truth in the love of it. These are "true sayings" of the true God; and therefore, the only thing wanted in order to enjoy the comfort of them, is to be enabled to believe them for ourselves. This, indeed, the Holy Spirit will not enable us to do, if we are either indulging sin, or neglecting duty, or seeking a sanction for inconsistencies; but where this is not the case, the Spirit will not refuse nor delay to increase our faith, if we try to grow in knowledge, that we may grow in grace. For reluctance to "lead into all truth" is no part of his character. He is a "free Spirit," and therefore, although he teach gradually, he will teach certainly, and "to profit."

When there is, however, perplexity on the subject of Justification by Faith, the best thing that can be done is, to examine the subject as if we had never heard of it before. And we ought to feel no reluctance to do so. Let us examine it now.

"*How can man be justified with God?*"—This solemn question was put by Bildad to Job; and although Job's answer was not explicit at the moment, his opinion on the

subject may be inferred from the fact, that he had said before, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me." Paul, however, has given a direct and full answer to this momentous question, by stating explicitly how he himself, and his fellow converts, sought to be justified.—"*We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.*" Gal. ii. 16. In this way, whatever it mean, Paul and his associates sought for justification before God. And whatever justification is, they found it by this means. Accordingly he said, "Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." And again, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus clearly does the Apostle declare both the means which he employed, and his success in using them. He took God's way, and God gave him his own wish. Although the chief of sinners, God justified Paul, when he believed on Christ for righteousness. Not, indeed, that God justified Paul's *conduct* or *principles* as a sinner. No! for if "he that justifieth the wicked is an abomination to the Lord," it is self-evident that, in the sense of thinking or declaring Paul *innocent*, the Lord himself did not, and could not, justify him. God forgiveth "iniquity, transgression, and sin;" but, in doing so, "he will by no means clear the guilty" from the charge of having been guilty. He treats sinners as kindly as if they were *innocent*, or as if they had never been sinners, when they return from sin to the Saviour; but he neither considers them innocent, nor palliates their guilt. He forgives, and even forgets, all the sins of all who believe; but he allows no believer to forget that he was a sinner, nor to suppose that his sins were not hateful and hated by Him. It is, therefore, because believing sinners are accepted for the sake of Christ, *as if they were not sinners*, that they are said to be justified by God.

The scriptural doctrine of Justification by Faith, is,—that the Saviour was treated as if he had been *guilty*, in

order that the guilty, who believed in Him, might be accepted as if they were *innocent*. This is what Paul means when he says of Christ, "He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The Saviour had no sin, he "knew no sin," yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. Why? Emmanuel had voluntarily, cheerfully, and fully, put himself in the room of sinners; and therefore he was treated as if their sins had been his own, so far as the *punishment* of them went. He had to bear the *curse* as fully as if he had personally incurred it. And just because he did so, the *blessing* is as freely given to them who believe, as if they personally deserved it; for what the Saviour *deserves* for his obedience and death, that the sinner obtains by relying on him for a holy salvation.

This is the justification revealed and promised in the Gospel. This is the justification which Paul sought and found by believing; he was welcomed, accepted, and blessed by God at the Cross, as if he had never sinned; because on that cross the Lamb of God *made* his soul an offering for sin. And what *more* could a sinner wish, than to be received with as much tenderness as if he were *innocent*? Innocence secures the fulness of the Divine love and favour. The angels are innocent, and therefore are the sons of God, radiant with his glory, and replenished with his own blessedness for ever. And yet—Gabriel when he tunes his harp, and prostrates his crown before the eternal throne; and seraphim, when they cover their faces with their wings, in adoration of God and the Lamb, are not more welcome than a sinner returning to God by the blood of the Lamb is! He, indeed, is not innocent; but, for the sake of that blood on which he relies, he is received as graciously and loved as freely, as admiring cherubim or adoring seraphim are. Accordingly, Paul, when speaking of "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," as studying the manifold wisdom of God, adds, "In Christ we (*we* in common with *them*) have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Him."

It is no valid objection against this simple view of justification, that God visits the transgressions of believers "with the rod," and their iniquity "with stripes." In this respect, indeed, they are not treated as innocent; but, what is far *better* for them, "God dealeth" with them "as with sons." "For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Only the *really* innocent can be exempted from all suffering. Believers are, however, treated as righteous, so far as it is *good* for them to be so.

They are adopted into the family of God, and made heirs of eternal life, as freely and fully as if they were personally righteous or wholly innocent: and if they are made to feel their sinfulness by their pardon, and are only acquitted as those who are justly condemned; this method of showing mercy does not lessen the value of the boon, but, indeed, enhances it, and sustains the honour of the Law and the Gospel at the same time. For it would not be good for us to be pardoned so, that our guilt should seem palliated; nor to escape from the curse so, that we should not feel that we had been under it. Such a way of saving sinners would be as injurious to their own spiritual interests, as it would be dishonourable to God. Accordingly, it is not God's way in justifying the ungodly who believe in Jesus: he welcomes them as if they were godly, but makes them to feel and confess that they are ungodly. Thus, even the *aboundings* of Divine grace towards sinners are "in all wisdom and prudence;" for whilst they remove the sting and stain of guilt from the conscience, they increase, rather than lessen, the sense of the evil of sin, in every conscience which is purged by the blood of Christ from "dead works," *i. e.*, from works which deserve death.

Here, then, is the justification which all sinners need, and which awaits every sinner who, like Paul, will believe in Christ, that he may be justified by the faith of Christ: God will accept him as righteous, for the sake of the righte-

ousness of Christ, and treat him for ever as one reconciled by the blood of the cross. Like the father of the returned prodigal, God will rejoice over him, and receive him into complete sonship. Having thus seen what justification really is, you now see,

FIRST, *How the Gospel suits your case as a sinner.* It assures you that, by believing on Christ, God will welcome and accept you as fully as if you had never sinned. Now this is exactly what you want and wish. You do *not* wish to be treated as He treats the innocent angels, except so far as that is necessary to the safety of your soul. Accordingly, you do not object to those fatherly chastisements which the children of God have to endure. What you desire is, to be a child of God. Well; there is ample provision in the Gospel for making you what you thus wish to be; for in coming to God by Christ, he will treat you for Christ's sake, as if you were righteous. Now, it is because you are *not* righteous, but sinful and unholy, that you are afraid. All your fear arises from your aggravated guilt and utter unworthiness. You cannot forget what you have been, nor overlook what you are, as a sinner before God. Well; you ought not to forget nor overlook it. It is, however, a mercy to feel sensible of it, and humbled for it? But now tell me, how would you feel if you were as innocent as a holy angel? Suppose that you had never sinned in thought, word, or deed, would you be *afraid* then? Would you, in that case, doubt whether God would admit you into his favour and kingdom? No, "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness;" and therefore you would feel confident, if you were perfectly righteous, that you would meet with no refusal from God. You could calculate to a certainty then, upon eternal happiness! So you might; for God can as soon cease to live as refuse to love the innocent. "But what is all this to the point," you say, "seeing I am not only not innocent, but very guilty and depraved too?" True; but if there is a *righteousness* so meritorious, that, for the sake of it, God can and will treat you as if you were not guilty, this would

answer the same purpose as perfect innocence on your own part. Do you not see that? You are, indeed, utterly unworthy; but the Saviour is infinitely worthy; if, therefore, you can have all the benefit of *his* worthiness placed to your own account, you will be as safe as if you had never sinned. Now this is just what God does for sinners, when they apply to Christ for all their salvation: he places to their account the righteousness of Christ, so that he welcomes them as if it were all their own.

Now this is the provision made for the justification of the ungodly who will believe in Christ; and, most certainly, it fully meets your case as a sinner, however guilty you may be; for your utter unworthiness cannot exceed the worthiness of the Lamb slain. "True," you say, "the righteousness of Christ is enough to justify me, or any sinner; but the question is, *will* God impute that righteousness to me? *will* he give me the benefit of it?" This question implies a doubt, if not a fear, that he may refuse to do so in your case. I therefore ask at once—*Why* do you fear that God will refuse to justify you for the sake of Christ? Has he any where *said* that he will not? Is it his *custom* to refuse those who are willing to submit to the righteousness of Christ? Has he ever sent away *any* one soul unclothed with that robe, who sought it in good earnest? No! All history, all heaven says, No! And were all hell compelled to answer these questions, it would say, No! Why, then, are *you* afraid of a refusal? There is nothing in the whole, or in any part, of the character of God, which renders it *necessary* that he should reject you; for, by the righteousness of Christ, he can be perfectly just in justifying any one who believes: and, as his *justice* is thus on your side, it is self-evident that none of his other perfections can be against you. In like manner, there is nothing in the character of the Saviour which renders your ejection necessary or likely. The robe of his righteousness is wide enough to embrace, and large enough to cover, your soul; and he is not less willing now to enfold sinners in it, than when he

threw it around the chief of sinners. For, as his righteousness is "upon" all them who do believe, so it is free unto all who *will* believe, on him for justification. Now, really, if these facts do not fully meet your case, as a sinner, it must be a very *peculiar* case, and its peculiarity must be *imaginary*, not actual; unless, indeed, you are still uncertain whether you are a believer or not.

But now, even if you have not yet, like Paul, believed in Christ, "that" you "might be *justified*;" still, something is gained by this inquiry, if you now understand what justification is, and see the *possibility* of your own justification. Are you then convinced that God could be just even in justifying *you* by faith? Is the way of acceptance through the merits of Christ plain to you, in all things but upon the point of *believing*? Could you now venture to *hope* freely, if you were sure that your believing is faith? Well; we are, then, in a fair way to bring this matter to a favourable issue. And it will facilitate this, to mark distinctly *what Paul believed in Christ for*.

Now he says, that he believed that he might be *justified*. His own justification was, therefore, his *first* object when he applied to Christ. And it *ought* to have been the first blessing which he sought by faith; for, until a condemned sinner is *acquitted* from the curse of the law, no other blessing, nor all the other blessings of grace, could *save* him. The sentence of condemnation must be repealed, or he must perish, whatever else were done for him. This solemn fact is, however, not sufficiently attended to even by the serious: and hence it is, that many of them *begin* their believing in Christ—not in order that they may be justified at once, or first, but that they may be made *better*, and be "born again." I do not, of course, find fault with this object in believing. Far from it. The man who does not apply to Christ to be made a "new creature," does not apply to him for the grand purpose for which Christ died and rose again. But still, salvation from sin, although the chief practical object of the Atonement, is not its *only* object.

Christ died to redeem us from the curse of the law ; and as nothing can place the soul in safety while it is under that curse, those who know this should *begin* their believing on Christ, for the express purpose of being justified, or freed from the curse. This plan of proceeding would not displace their moral designs, nor lessen their solicitude about holiness ; and it would bring their faith in Christ to the test, far more effectually than the other plan does. The man who is trying to rely on the Saviour, merely that he may be enabled to become a *better* man, finds this kind of believing so easy, that it is no wonder if he doubt whether his believing is *that* faith which is produced by the operation of the Spirit ;—whereas, were he to go to the mercy-seat for the distinct purpose of believing in Christ, in order that the *curse* of the eternal law might be taken off from his soul ; this solemn errand would show him how much faith he needed, and how necessary it is to pray, “ Lord, help my unbelief, and increase my faith.”

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No. VI.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND THE LAMB.

IN nothing, perhaps, is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart more sensible or self-evident, than in the new views and feelings which it produces in regard to prayer. Even where prayer is not altogether neglected, nor hurried over heedlessly, there is a wonderful change of sentiment takes place, whenever the Gospel takes effect upon the mind. We see and feel then, that except for temporal mercies, we never prayed in thorough good earnest, nor had any real love or relish for devotion. It was often performed as a task, and always as a mere duty. We attended to it rather to prevent temporal evil, than to obtain spiritual

good ; and more from a dread of the consequences of being prayerless, than from any pleasure we had in praying. Indeed, as to *pleasure* in devotion, it seemed to us a contradiction in terms, or an impossible thing. Accordingly, if we knew any one who was in the habit of spending much time in his closet, we were ready, if not to rank him with the Pharisees, who loved "long prayers," to wonder what he found to say during the time. And when we heard ministers appeal to such men, affirming that they sometimes *left* their closets with more reluctance than they ever felt on *entering* them, and that they could almost have chosen to die on their knees, or to have spent an eternity in that happy frame of mind, we either knew not what to think, or thought that they had a very *strange* taste indeed. In a word, there was nothing seemed so unlikely to us, as that we should ever take pleasure in praying. But lo ! when we awoke to the worth of our immortal souls, and were made alive to the infinite value of an everlasting salvation, we were glad of any opportunity of pouring out our hearts unto God. Our difficulty then was, not how to find time or heart for prayer, but how to obtain answers to prayer : and we were never so happy as when hope and peace were stealing upon our minds, whilst thus wrestling with God for mercy. Then we began to understand what we had heard about the pleasures of devotion, and no longer wondered that communion with God should be magnetic to the soul. And it is no wonder ! For what can be so delightful as that holy calm of the mind which enables us to unbosom unto God, as unto a father, all our feelings and desires ; to dwell on all his perfections, not only without dismay or dislike, but with complacency and confidence ; to repeat and plead all his great and precious promises with faith and hope ; and to anticipate his guidance until death, and his presence through eternity ? This is a joy which the world cannot give. Even when it does not rise so high as all this, it is more satisfying than any human pleasure ; for the heart is relieved and soothed, if it can only pour out its

fears and anxieties into the bosom of God. The bare consciousness of having felt as in his presence, wept as in his presence, and spoken as in his presence, leaves a sweet solemnity upon the spirits, which is healing, if not exhilarating. And when the soul can realize God as noticing, listening, and pitying, and feels itself getting nearer and nearer to his presence and heart, and finds itself melted and impressed, as if he were visibly present or audibly speaking, then its joy is "unspeakable," even if it is not "full of glory."

These hints will remind you of the

"Moments rich in blessing,"

which you have spent upon your knees before the Cross and the mercy-seat. You can, indeed, never forget those closet interviews with God and the Lamb; for they were the chief means of determining your choice, of fixing your principles, and of forming your character. You may, indeed, have lost so much of your first devotional spirit, that you no longer obtain such happy interviews with God in your closet; and if so, you cannot remember the past without pain. You cannot, however, *forget* the days of old, nor the morning of your first love. They are imperishable recollections in every renewed soul; for when communion with God *sets* as a day-star in the heart, the memory of it *rises* as a dog-star in the conscience. Your shadow is not more inseparable from you than the consciousness of your loss and declension; and hence your secret, if not your public, language is, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone in my tabernacle!"

Now, when those who have enjoyed communion with God lose it thus, there can be no doubt that there has been on their own part, some sin, imprudence, or remissness, which occasioned the loss: for God is not the *first* to hide his face, nor does he ever withhold his presence arbitrarily. He may not always manifest himself to the soul so sensibly and sweetly as at first; but he does not withdraw

his presence entirely, except when he is provoked : but as it is the exhalations from the earth, and not from the heavens, which form the clouds and mist that hide the natural sun, so it is something from ourselves, not from God, which conceals the Sun of Righteousness from those who, having once walked in his light, now walk in darkness. Such being the fact of the case, it is self-evident that the darkness cannot be removed, but by the removal of that which brought it on, whatever it was. Whether sin or sloth, negligence or irregularity, wrong tempers or bad habits, they must be abandoned, if we would have the light of the Divine countenance, or the joy of salvation, restored. For "*if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*" We never can combine a worldly spirit with a devotional spirit, nor keep up a good hope in a bad conscience. In like manner, if less time than usual is allowed for secret prayer, or less pains taken to enter into and keep up the spirit of it, communion with God is not to be obtained, and need not be expected. God does not, indeed, exact a *long* time for prayer ; but, until we seek him with our "whole heart," he will not cheer our hearts with a sense of his presence. He will be "inquired of," before he will shine forth from between the cherubim. Now, hasty and heartless prayer does not amount to *inquiring* ; and it hinders the manifestations of the Divine presence. Indeed, *haste*, like the unbelief of the Jews, which prevented Christ from doing many mighty works among them, prevents God from communing with the soul from the mercy-seat. There is not *time* for it, when we are in haste to get away from our closets. We ourselves are not *prepared* to enjoy or improve it, when we are up from our knees in a few minutes. We could not commune with a friend in that space of time, nor in that state of mind : so that when prayer comes to this low ebb, it is no wonder if *Bethel* is turned into *Luz* again, and the soul sent empty away from the throne of grace.

But, whilst all this is only too true, it is equally true, that *mistakes*, on the subject of communion with God, prevail so as to prevent it in a great measure, even when there is much prayer and watchfulness maintained. Some do not venture to *expect* much of the Divine presence, but actually lay their account with walking often in darkness, because they see how often Job, and David, and Asaph, and Jeremiah, and the Old Testament saints, were under the hidings of the Divine countenance. Observing this fact, some believers take for granted, and as a matter of course, that they must experience similar trials of their faith and patience, however they act.

Now, it is certainly true, that the complaints of the Old Testament saints are only too appropriate to the generality of Christians. There *is* almost all the darkness and distress of mind, which the Psalms are employed to express, and which they do express so fully and emphatically. But this should not be the case—it is not *necessarily* the case—in the church of Christ. We live under “a better Covenant,” and brighter promises; and therefore it is our own fault, by misconduct or mistake, if we have no more light than those who lived under the old Covenant. If, however, we are willing and trying to walk closely with God, and to enjoy an habitual sense of his presence, why form our ideas or expectations from the state of things under the old Covenant? It certainly does not follow, as a matter of course, that, because *David* was often in darkness, a real Christian must be so too. It is not a matter of necessity that, because Job could not find the Divine presence, we should be unable to find it. These good men had, indeed, some greater excellencies of character than we can pretend to; and, on that ground, were more likely to be honoured with more of the Divine presence; but the dispensation which they lived under did not provide for so much of it as the Gospel does. Christ says to us, “He that believeth on me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” Accordingly, we do not find the Apostles

complaining, as the Prophets did, that they were under the hidings of God's face. They complain bitterly of the presence and pressure of a body of sin and death, and of a law in their members which warred against the law of their minds; but never of an *absent* God.

This matter requires to be looked into minutely, seeing so many form their opinions and expectations of communion with God, from the old, instead of the new Covenant. Now, we do not take the old Covenant for our principal guide in any thing else. We even boast of our superior light and liberty under the Gospel, and of our nearer and freer access to God, and of our greater privileges. But, where is the *reality* of these blessings, if we *must* be as often in darkness and distress of soul as David was? I say "must," because it is certain that we *may* and *shall* go without the sun if we do not walk circumspectly. The Holy Spirit will frown upon sin and sloth as fully under the Gospel as he did under the law, and certainly withhold and withdraw the joy of salvation from backsliders. All this is inevitable from the eternal principles of the Divine character and government, because it is the only way of preventing or curing sin and backsliding among believers. But still, the real question is, what have they to expect under the Gospel, whose life and conversation "becometh the Gospel?" Now, as they are not warranted to expect exemption from trials or temptations, it must be more of the Divine presence than was usually enjoyed by the saints under the law. Accordingly, except in those churches which had fallen from their first love and purity, we find, amongst the primitive Christians, *no* indications of those complaints which were so frequent in the Jewish church. The sad and piercing cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"—and "Why art thou silent at the voice of my roaring?"—is never heard from any believer, in any of the New Testament Churches; a plain proof that, after the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, believers had boldness of access into the holy of holies by the blood of Christ,

and were thus sure to find God whenever they sought him. Now, from this fact, and not from the case of David, we ought to form our opinions and expectations of communion with God.

Besides, it is by far too little remembered that David was a prophetic type of the Saviour, and thus gave utterance to *his* mediatorial sorrows, as well as to his own personal sorrows—a fact which lessens very much the *number* of those hidings of the Divine presence which he seems to have experienced. In like manner, their number is still further reduced by the fact, that, under the Jewish dispensation, *temporal* calamities were considered as hidings of God's countenance; and *delay* in removing affliction was spoken of as the shutting out of prayer. It is, therefore, both unnecessary and unwise to make the apparent experience of David, the standard of what may be expected from a close walk with God in Christ. By doing so, many have deprived themselves of much comfort, and God of much honour.

The truth of these remarks is not affected by the melancholy fact, that the enjoyment of the Divine presence, or intimate communion with God, is a rare thing in the present day. It certainly is so: but not because God is *unwilling* to commune with us at the mercy-seat—not because there is not ample provision made for nearness and freedom of access to him—but because so few seek him with their “whole heart,” or allow him *time* to manifest his presence to their souls. Settle it, therefore, in your own mind, for it is settled already and unalterably in his Word, that you are “not straitened” in God or in the Lamb. Your fellowship may be truly and habitually with them, if you are willing to “walk in the light,” as they are in the light. If you are ready, “all things” in heaven “are ready,” for sweet communion with God. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne with a censer of meritorious incense, in the shadow of which you may always kneel with safety, and from the fragrance of which your prayers may always find

acceptance, when they are according to the will of God. And the infirmity-helping Spirit is ever at hand to teach you how to pray and what to pray for. "*Enter,*" therefore, "*into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*"

In order, however, to understand the subject of communion with God aright, more mistakes require to be removed. Now, it is a mistake to imagine that nothing amounts to the Divine presence in prayer, but what produces a holy calm of mind, or a high excitement of feeling. We naturally make our first sensible enjoyments in prayer, the *standard* by which we judge of our future success. Accordingly, when we do not find that delight nor liberty which we experienced formerly, we are apt to conclude that God has hid his face from us, or that we have lost the spirit of devotion. Under this impression, we go heartless and hopeless to our closets, and feel, at times, almost inclined to give up prayer, because we have no longer our usual enjoyment in it. Sometimes, indeed, our hearts are so cold and dead, that it seems an insult to God to attempt prayer in such a frame. We cannot, however, live long without it; and therefore we are compelled to pray, as we can, soon. Our memory, however, clings to the sweet and soothing moments of the days of old, and our souls continue to long for the return of these "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Now this is right: but it is *wrong* to make them the standard of the Divine presence. Such ecstatic enjoyment in devotion, as that which is sometimes vouchsafed to the soul at the *outset*, is not necessary in order to our going on in the walk of faith. For, when we began to follow Christ, there was reluctance, yea, aversion of heart, to prayer, to be overcome. It was, therefore, necessary, in order to reconcile and attach us to prayer, to grant such enjoyment in it, as should prove to us that it was no vain nor wearisome thing to wait on God. But now we are convinced of this, and ashamed of our former preju-

dices against devotion. We know by experience that it is "good to draw nigh unto God," nor could any one persuade us that it is insipid or useless work. We are not ashamed to avow that our happiest moments have been spent at his throne. So far, therefore, our first communion with God has answered the purpose of establishing the claims and the habit of prayer; and this being accomplished, raptures should not be necessary to maintain them, but the steady oar of duty, without the full sail of excitement, enough to carry us on.

This is, however, only the lowest view of the matter, and but introductory to more scriptural views of it. The real fact of the case is—that our first enjoyments in prayer are not always connected with clear views of the whole scheme of salvation. What we knew of it at first, we felt deeply, and prized highly; but, then, we attached quite as much importance to our own feelings, as to the *facts* which gave rise to them; and drew, perhaps, more of our comfort from them, than from the Gospel itself. We might not, indeed, be aware of this at the time, and may never have intended to do so; but that we really did so, is evident, from the single fact, that when our *feelings* began to decline, our comfort decayed with them, although our belief of the Gospel continued almost unaltered; a plain proof that we attached, though perhaps unintentionally, more importance to the work of the Spirit *in* us, than to the work of Christ *for* us. God, I am fully aware, does not make the nice distinctions which theorists do on this subject, nor does he scorn the confusion of ideas which mark our first applications to the Saviour. He can listen with pleasure to the broken music of a "bruised reed," however *Sandemanianism* may despise it. But, whilst all this is true, it is equally true that he will gradually bring off converts from relying on their *feelings*, just as he brought them off from relying on their works. In a word, he will make Christ himself, and his finished work, more precious to our souls, than any feelings which they gave rise to.

Here, then, except the Holy Spirit has been grieved by an untender walk, is the grand reason why God does not continue our sensible and rapturous enjoyments in prayer: we were, unawares, it may be, but certainly, putting it in the place of the Saviour himself; and therefore God wisely and kindly withheld it as a direct communication from his Spirit, that we might draw all our hope and comfort from the Gospel itself, and learn to live by faith upon Christ as he is revealed to us in the Scriptures. God has not, therefore, been hiding his face from you, nor yet shutting out your prayer, because he has not shone upon your soul in prayer as formerly; but because you required to be more completely "shut up unto the faith." You were living more by *sense* than by faith, and thus it became necessary to draw and drive you off from changeable feelings to an unchangeable Saviour. Accordingly, the want of sensible enjoyment has compelled you to re-examine the plan of salvation, and to re-consider whether you were seeking to be justified by faith, or, "as it were, by the works of the law."

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## No. VII.

THE HOPE OF SALVATION THE BEST SAFEGUARD TO THE UNDERSTANDING AGAINST ERROR, AND OF THE HEART AGAINST SIN.

ALEXANDER the Great having, on one occasion, distributed the whole of his private fortune among his friends and generals, was asked why he left nothing for himself: "HOPE is still left for me," said the ardent monarch. And, in the affairs of this life, hope is still the last thing which

\* See this subject fully treated in the second part of this volume, "*Communion with God, or a Guide to the Devotional.*"

we relinquish. It seats itself upon the throne of the heart in the morning of life, and leaves it only when the heart is breaking under the cold hand of death. It hovers around the cradle of our infancy, when "*it doth not appear what we shall be*;" and over the coffin of our old age, when it doth not appear what we are. Hope is the sun that rules the "day," and the moon that rules the "night" of life. It is the rainbow which gilds the clouds of our calamity, and the morning star which leads on our brighter prospects. In a word, hope is to the soul what the soul is to the body—the mainspring of life and action. Take it away, and soon the energies of the body and the mind wither and perish. Hopeless labour is all fatigue; hopeless enterprise is unsteady; hopeless suffering is overwhelming.

Whatever, therefore, may be said in theory, against hoping too much, and whatever may be proved from experience, against the indulgence of sanguine hopes, the sober fact is, that hope is essential to success in all the business of life; because, without it, diligence is weak and resolution wavering. The business of life could not go on, nor the trials of life be sustained, if mankind did not wear the helmet of hope. It is their strength and safeguard amidst the duties and sufferings of the present state of being.

All this is equally true of the hope of salvation: it is the helmet of the Christian, which, by protecting his head from mental error, fortifies his heart against temptation, distraction, and despondency. His very *character* is both formed and confirmed chiefly by the hope of salvation, and rises or falls as that hope is high or low. When his hopes are dim or languid, duty, and especially devotion, languishes with them; when they are bright and firm, all duties are pleasant and all trials tolerable. He has then heart and hand to do and endure the will of God. But when the hopes of a Christian decline and fade away, until he hardly knows what to think of his case, the effect is, that although he will not throw up his profession, nor risk his character, he will not maintain either so well as he did whilst he was

sustained by a hope full of immortality. He may still pray in his family and in his closet; but not with a truly devotional spirit. He may still continue regular in his attendance upon all divine ordinances; but he will not come to them with his former relish or expectation: for hope is the very *soul* of devotion and holiness, and therefore they abound or subside together. Hence the importance and necessity of maintaining the hope of salvation.

Now, it is a curious fact, that the truly serious are the most "slow of heart" to take up, or to keep up, the hope of salvation. They are the last to lay hold of it, and the first to let it go, in their own case. Indeed, real converts are almost the only class who require to be urged to cherish hope. The generality, even of the careless and undecided, hope for salvation, just as they hope for any thing else, as a matter of course. "As I hope to be saved," is the usual mode of expression, when any doubtful assertion is confirmed. Thus it is—we seldom see a careless man who is afraid to hope for salvation; and we never see a godly man, who has not been afraid to hope for it in his own case. Indeed, it is with a timid heart and a trembling hand, that all true penitents lay hold of the hope of eternal life. Even when they see both their way and their welcome to "the hope set before them" in the Gospel, their sense of utter unworthiness almost unfits them for hoping freely or fully. And even when they venture to cherish "a good hope through grace," they are almost ashamed and afraid to acknowledge it to others, or, indeed, to themselves. Now, if such timidity and hesitation were as *wise* as they are amiable, it would be wise to let them alone: for any thing that would change them into rashness or flippant boldness would be highly unwise and wicked. They may, however, be removed, without being replaced by presumption or boasting. Paul's humility was not destroyed nor lessened, when he ventured to say of Christ, "He loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." In fact, the belief of this deepened his humility, by increasing his happiness. The joy of sal-

vation was "the strength" of his heart, in all the holy principles, in which it was strongest. How did he pass so uncontaminated through a world lying in wickedness ; and so unshaken through all the clamour and sophistry of controversy ; and so triumphant through all his trials and persecutions ? He wore the hope of salvation, as a helmet upon his head ; and his *understanding* being thus protected against mental error, his heart and conscience were fortified against temptation. And thus alone can you keep "the faith," or continue the "good fight ;" for, without the hope of salvation to guard your judgment, your principles may be so upset or unsettled, by false doctrine, as to yield no enjoyment under trouble, and no strength in the hour of temptation.

It is, I am aware, more common to encourage believers in their work and warfare, by persuading them to *keep up heart*, than by urging them to guard well their understanding and judgment. But the heart cannot be kept up, if the *head* is not kept safe from the assaults of error. Our intellectual powers must be protected, if we would keep our moral powers pure or vigorous ; for we cannot *feel* aright, if we *judge* wrong ; nor act aright, if we choose wrong ; nor maintain a good conscience, if we give way to a disordered imagination. Now, the grand security for a "sound mind," and through that, for a "pure heart," is to "*put on for a helmet the hope of salvation.*" That hope, by entrenching the understanding in the *truth* of the Gospel, will best lay and keep open the heart to all the holy and consoling influence of the Gospel.

The point on which these general remarks bear is this ; we may be so tempted by infidelity and false doctrines, and get so entangled with doubts, or disputes as to be unable to maintain our ground. Now, as every one cannot pursue that course of reading, nor follow out that train of reasoning, which would clear up all speculative difficulties, it is of the utmost importance to be familiar with some single and simple fact of revelation, which shall be an "anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast," amidst the winds of doctrine,

and the fluctuations of opinion ; and which shall regulate the mind as the magnetism of the pole does the motions of the needle. Now, the security is to be found in "the hope of salvation." The man who understands the salvation of God, and cherishes the hope of it, has, within himself, a retreat from which no sophistry nor error can drive or draw him away.

Is he tempted to *Infidelity*? Its objections may be plausible, and its sarcasms perplexing, to him. He may be unable to answer or to analyze them in detail. They may throw a momentary spell upon his spirit, and a mist on his vision : but he will see, at a glance, and feel with all the keenness of a sensation, that infidelity has nothing to offer, which can be compared with the "great salvation" it would rob him of. For, if present hope and eternal happiness are his objects, he has securities for them in the Bible, infinitely stronger than natural religion can give to her votaries, for the vague prospects which they cherish. Thus, the moment he looks to the hope of salvation, he perceives that the light of nature reveals no such heaven beyond the grave, nor ratifies any one hope which it is said to inspire. So long, therefore, as eternal happiness is dear to him, his faith in the Gospel is impregnable to all the assaults of scepticism, because he must be a *loser* by that system. Thus the single and simple reflection—I could gain nothing, and I might lose all, by relinquishing the Bible—enables him to possess his soul in patience, amidst all the mysteries of revelation, and all the wiles of its enemies.

Nor is this all: the man who is familiar with, and confirmed in, the hope of the "great salvation," soon perceives that its *character* is peculiar ; so peculiar, that it has no parallel nor semblance in any rival system. He may not know, in detail, the moral character of ancient heathenism, nor the precise nature of that heaven which philosophy dreamt of ; but from all that he hears, even from the eulogists of the philosophers, it is self-evident to him, that they never *thought* of such a salvation as the Gospel reveals.

Indeed, the more he is plied with their boasted discoveries, the more will he feel persuaded that it never "entered the heart of man to conceive what God hath laid up for them that love him." Thus, the humblest believer is *ball-proof* against all the array of infidel philosophy; because he has only to observe, that its best morals do not amount, even in theory, to conformity to the Divine image; nor its highest purity to true holiness; nor its brightest prospects to any thing like the heaven of the Bible. Its very Platos are vile, when compared with the Apostles of the Lamb, and its Socrateses are but children in their company. In a word, he can find nothing, true or false, in any system of natural religion, which even *borders* upon the sublime idea of a salvation which embraces the justification of "soul, body, and spirit," for eternity! All human schemes propose nothing beyond the *amendment* of human nature; for the Gospel alone proposes to make us "*holy as God is holy.*" We have, therefore, in order to be unmoved by all the parade of learned scepticism, only to keep before us the holy character of the great salvation; that, like the spear of Ithuriel, will always detect Satan, even when he transforms himself into an angel of the Light of Nature.

In like manner, is the believer tempted to *Unitarianism*? He is perfectly safe, so long as he wears, as a helmet, the hope of that salvation which is revealed in the Gospel. His knowledge of criticism, or of logic, or of ecclesiastical history, may be too slight to assist his faith. But, even if he is unable to draw upon any other source than his English Bible, the very *heaven* which it reveals will render his faith impregnable to the whole artillery of Socinian learning and sophistry. They may puzzle him with the ambiguities of a figurative text, or set him fast by some sweeping assertion, or perplex him by an appeal to his common sense, which the *uncommon* sense of an angel could not answer by dint of mere reasoning; but still he is safe, and may be triumphant, if he wield the character of the heaven of the Bible manfully. Neither the blustering assertions,

nor the sleek insinuations of Unitarianism, can move him, while he takes his stand on "the sea of glass before the throne;" because there, he hears songs and sentiments, which give the *lie* direct to both the letter and spirit of Unitarian worship. There, all the armies of heaven at the same time and in the same terms, adore both God and the Lamb. Their posture is as lowly, and their song as lofty, when they worship the Son, as when they worship the Father. And, in regard to salvation, all "the spirits of just men made perfect" ascribe it entirely and exclusively to the blood of Christ. Thus, there rushes down from all the hearts and harps of heaven, one uniform and everlasting stream of equal glory to God and the Lamb, and of adoring gratitude for the Atonement. And, then, all this goes forward in the presence, and with the permission, and therefore by the appointment of God: for neither angels nor saints would dare to worship as they do, in heaven, if it were not "*the will of God*" that they should honour the Son even as they honour the Father; and that the Atonement should have all the glory of salvation. Nothing but the divine will could establish such worship amongst perfect spirits; and it is self-evident that God would not have willed it, if it were not agreeable to the eternal facts of his nature, and the moral principles of his government.

Thus the believer has all heaven on his side, in defence of his hope of salvation through the merits of a divine and atoning Saviour. If, therefore, he cannot quote scholar against scholar, nor antiquity against modern upstarts, nor the canons of criticism against sciolists, he can quote the "New Song" against all the reasonings and railings of his opponents, and appeal to "the general assembly" of saints and angels, for the truth of his sentiments. That army of the living God, cannot, he is sure, mislead nor deceive him; and as he knows, from their example, *what* is the "will" of God in heaven, and *how* it is "done" there, he is equally sure that, whilst adoring God and the Lamb, and glorying only in the Cross, he is doing the will of God "on earth"

exactly "as it is done in heaven." Thus the great principles of a Christian's faith are as infallible as the worship of heaven. We have only to keep clearly before our minds the character of the great salvation, which is—that it is *blood-bought*, in order to see at a glance that Unitarianism is as unlike it as Mahometanism is.

In like manner, is the believer tempted to *Antinomianism*? He is perfectly safe against all its insinuating snares, while he maintains the hope of that salvation which is revealed in the Gospel. It is a *holy* salvation, if it is any thing. A salvation *from* sin, not *in* sin. How any one can overlook this self-evident fact, is most amazing; for it is written, as with sunbeams, on every principle and promise of the Gospel. It is, however, both overlooked and practically denied by some who profess the firmest attachment to the doctrines of grace. They even boast that the divine law is not binding upon them as a *rule* of life; that they are free to live as they like; that sin can do them no real injury, and that God does not see any iniquity in them! I once heard one of this school declare from the pulpit, that if he were to go out and commit a *murder*, the sin, although it might bring him to the gallows, would not only not risk his salvation, but it could not for a moment bring even the shadow of a doubt upon his mind as to the certainty of his salvation. In this form, Antinomianism is its own antidote, and any thing but a temptation to believers. This, however, is not the form which it usually assumes: it comes before us speaking great things of Christ and grace, and ascribing all the glory of salvation to them alone. It almost professes to open the Lamb's Book of Life, and to read therein the very names of its adherents. It takes up the case of the weary and heavy-laden sinner, and interprets all his feeling into proofs of his election and eternal justification. It goes into all the worst workings of the heart, and teaches those who are conscious of them, that they must be the children of God, because they notice these things. Now, as all the truly serious are conscious of much indwelling sin, and of

many imperfections ; and as these things often destroy or damp their hope of salvation ; and as they naturally wish to feel assured of their safety ; it is a strong temptation to them, when any one offers to prove their election from the very facts which lead them to *doubt* it. And the proposal to do so, is the more plausible, because the pretence is, that the sole design is to exalt the Saviour and to humble the sinner—to glorify God and give peace through the blood of the Cross—to endear the everlasting Covenant, and honour the Eternal Spirit. All this is so like the glorious Gospel, and embraces so much of its grand design, that one can hardly think of suspecting its truth or its tendency. And as the truly serious do not intend to apply this offered relief to any bad purpose, but merely to get over their doubts and fears by it ; and as they wish for no liberty to sin—this easy and speedy way of reaching assurance becomes very tempting to them, especially if they are under a ministry which does not clearly show them “ a better way.” For the fact is, an awakened conscience and a wounded spirit will seek relief somewhere ; and, if they do not find it in low doctrinal sentiments, they will grasp at it in high, and take it from any thing rather than sink into despair. If, therefore, they find that the ministry which has wounded, does not heal them, or that it makes salvation by faith appear quite as difficult to obtain as salvation by *works* would be, and thus brings them no nearer to their object ; it is no wonder if they try another ministry, and even welcome one which turns their doubts and perplexities, as well as their desires, into proofs of faith, and tokens of safety.

It is in this way that many are drawn into Antinomian principles. Their object, at first was chiefly to get hold of something which would give rest to their souls ; and, as that kind of preaching which makes saving faith appear quite as impossible as perfect obedience, did not relieve them, but rather tantalized them by a remedy which whilst it was called *free*, was kept back until their works should demonstrate their faith, they were glad to grasp at any thing

which promised speedier relief. Accordingly, when they were assured that their fears and desires, and even their very doubts, were the work of the Spirit in them; and that his work *in* the soul is the *warrant* to believe that the death of Christ and the decree of God were for the soul;—this nostrum met all their difficulties. For as they could say, with perfect truth, that they felt and desired, under the Gospel, as they had never done before; and as this state of mind was declared to be the effect of Divine influence, and thus a proof of their election and redemption;—such doctrine might well please them. But, at this stage of their experience, the Gospel itself would have pleased them better, if it had been as plainly brought before them; because, then, they were in search of nothing but the hope of salvation, and wanted no relief from the rules, but only from the *curse*, of the law. Had they, therefore, been directed, at that moment, to the Divine Testimony concerning the person and work of Christ; and had they been shown clearly, from the Scriptures, that the cordial belief of that testimony is saving faith; and that faith itself warrants immediate hope; this would have met all their difficulties, without laying asleep their watchfulness, or their fear of sin.

Well: you see all this, if you have taken up the hope of salvation at the Cross simply by relying on Christ for it. You have, therefore, no occasion to meddle with the unscriptural nostrums of those who put the work of the Spirit in the room of the work of Christ, and give that place to election which the Cross alone occupies in the Gospel. You have no occasion to shift the position of things in the “well ordered” Covenant, before you can enter into the ark of it. “Ye have not so learned Christ,” from these pages, as to feel it necessary to have another warrant than the Word of God, for believing on Christ for your own justification. Whatever comfort you want, you can find it more readily, and more abundantly in the single fact, “that he who believeth *hath* eternal life,” than in all the boasted consolations of Antinomianism,—the very first principle of

which is wrong, inasmuch as it substitutes feelings for faith. And whenever you want to see the grand fallacy and infamy of this system, you have only to observe that the very *first* promise of that new Covenant, which it pretends to venerate so much, is at utter and eternal variance with the rejection of the law as a rule of life. That first promise is, "*I will put my laws in their hearts, and write them in their minds, saith the Lord :*" a fact which is fatal to all unholy applications of the doctrines of grace. In a word, real Antinomianism is the hope of a salvation *from* that holy salvation, which is "the end" of election, redemption, and regeneration.

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## No. VIII.

## DEVOTIONAL SELF-EXAMINATION.

No man *knows* himself, who is not in the habit of *examining* himself; and no man examines himself impartially, who does not place himself under the omniscient eye of God, and thus invite and submit to divine scrutiny. Our hearts are too deep to be fathomed by our conscience, and too deceitful to be unmasked by our judgment. Indeed, the heart can blind and pervert both the judgment and the conscience. Hence the necessity of carrying the whole soul to be searched and tried by God, even after all our efforts to examine ourselves: for, until we are alone and upon our knees before the Searcher of hearts, we are both liable and *sure* to impose on ourselves. We may, indeed, know, from observation and experience, what is our weak side, or our besetting sin, and thus have a general idea of our real character; but how weak that side is, or how strong that sin is, we are not fully aware, until we look at them in the light of God. Accordingly we have found them to be greater, and have been betrayed by them oftener,

than we suspected at first. They have carried us farther than we calculated upon, and led us into more wrong steps than we anticipated, at first. Yes; and both our weak side and our besetting sin, if left to themselves, are quite capable of hurrying us as much beyond any evil which we now fear, as they were of drawing us into those evils which we now deplore. For, what our hearts are thus led to by their own propensities, is only a specimen of the *direction*, rather than of the *lengths*, they are inclined to go, when allowed to take their own way. Now, if we must say already, that our hearts have gone too far astray; and if we believe that they are naturally "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" it is high time to take measures for the prevention and cure of their evil tendencies. And, for these purposes, the habit of *self-examination* in the sight of the omniscient God, is equally necessary and useful.

David furnishes an example of this devotional habit, which will illustrate at once these introductory hints. He was an attentive observer and scrutinizer of himself, especially after his restoration to the Divine favour. From that time, his "soul" was, as it were, "continually in his hand;" his "spirit made diligent search; he communed" with his own heart even "upon his bed," and considered his ways. Now, this was self-examination, in the ordinary sense of the duty; but he did not stop there. He knew and believed the deceitfulness of his heart too well, to trust its verdict in his own cause; and, therefore, followed up his own scrutiny by praying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Thus, that there might be no deception, he solemnly put his case into the hands, and under the eye, of God. This was impartial, because devotional, self-examination.

Having referred to this example, as an illustration of the subject, it may be well to glance at the principles of it.

Now, the prayer, "Search me and try me," recognises, as an unquestionable truth, the omniscience of Jehovah, and proceeds upon the solemn fact, that "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom they have to do." It was, however, by realizing the scrutiny of this omniscience in his *own* case, that David understood how it extended to all creatures, times, and places. "Thou hast searched and known *me*," is the point from which he started, in his way to the sublime and awful conclusion, "The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." And the conclusion is just; for if David's heart, in all its recesses, was naked and open unto God, all hearts and all things must be equally visible to Him; because the *power* which can search one, can search all; and the *reason* for searching any heart, holds good in the case of all hearts. God is the Judge of all; and, as the secrets of every heart will be brought into judgment, none can escape his notice. Each may, therefore, say to himself, "*Lord, thou hast searched and known me:*" others may *guess* what I am, from what I seem; and argue from what my life is, what my heart must be: "*but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether:*" thou art not deceived, nor at any loss, whoever may be so!

Now with this solemn conviction clinging to him like his shadow—why did David pray thus, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts?" He had just acknowledged that God *had* done so already, and fully; for he does not say, Search me *more* than thou hast ever done. The reason is obvious: God searches all; but he does not *lead* all "in the way everlasting." Some are given up to their own hearts' lusts, and thus led captive by the devil, at his will, when they refuse to be led by the Spirit. David knew this: and, as his object was to walk in the way of salvation, his prayer was, that he might be so searched as to escape every "wicked way." And there is a special and gracious searching of the heart, the *results* of which God shows to them who fear Him; thus discovering *to* them, what he discovers *in* them. Not, indeed,

that He shows them at once all that he sees in them: the most holy could not sustain the full sight of all the plagues of their own hearts. God, therefore, reveals them gradually to his people, that the appalling sight may not overwhelm their hopes of sanctification. He does, however, show so much, from time to time, as to convince believers that their own hearts are not to be trusted, even to their own *examination*; but require, in order to be upright in all things, to be searched by the eye of Omniscience.

Now, it is a good sign, when we are afraid of self-deception, and court the scrutiny of God; when we are willing to know the worst of our own case, and desirous to judge impartially; and when for this purpose, we call in the eye of God to search us. For, by thus examining ourselves, and submitting to Divine examination, Believers are distinguished.

*First*, From the FORMALIST, who takes no notice of the state of his heart in religion. It is indeed, strange, that any can be so infatuated, as to forget the necessity of worshipping a Spirit, "in spirit and in truth:" but, alas! it is forgotten and overlooked. Many, like the Jews of old, go to the sanctuary of God, and "sit as his people sit, and hear as they hear; but their hearts are far from him." This is no sweeping charge: for, if their hearts were "right with God," they would worship him at *home* as well as in the sanctuary; and in the sanctuary by *sacraments*, as well as by prayer or praise. But how few compass the family or sacramental altar, or retire to pray in secret to Him who seeth in secret! All this may, indeed, be done, by mere formalists; but, when all this is neglected, there certainly is none of the "power" of godliness, nor any habit of self-examination. It is, therefore, a good sign, when the claims of all duties are seriously weighed, and the state of the heart towards and in them is chiefly regarded. This distinguishes Believers.

*Secondly*, From the RECKLESS PROFESSOR, who dare not search his own heart. Some have the hardihood to con-

tinue at the sacrament, even after they have discovered that their convictions were not conversion, nor their first resolutions, principles. They depart from their closets and give up the power of godliness; but there is no departure from the Lord's table. Conscience says to them, "Keep back, or begin on new principles;" and thus, like Balaam's angel, waves a drawn sword between them and a sacrament for which they have no relish. But Pride says, "Keep your place and your name; defeat suspicion, by defying it; keep up appearances, whatever it cost, for it is too mortifying to expose yourself by your own act of withdrawing!" Now, in such a case, the heart dare not examine itself before God, but is afraid of its own whispers, and conscious that a full disclosure of its secrets, even to itself, would be almost as humiliating as the exposure of them to others. Thus, the matter will not bear thinking of, and therefore appearances are kept up at all hazards, by shutting the eyes upon the hazards.

This fearful state of mind must not, however, be confounded with those occasional misgivings of heart, which the serious feel in regard to the reality of their own conversion, and their right to the sacrament. There is an immense difference between habitual recklessness, and occasional disrelish; especially when the want of relish is deeply deplored, and the causes of it are searched out. All is not wrong, while self-examination is kept up, and while what is wrong is dreaded and hated. Like an erring but affectionate child, a believer may feel himself in disgrace; but, while he feels out of his element, and is trying to return into his rest, his case is not hopeless, because it is not heartless nor heedless. In like manner, the habit of self-examination in the presence of God distinguishes its adherents.

*Thirdly*, From the INCONSISTENT Professor, who is unwilling to be led out of every "wicked way." David prayed thus:—"See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Thus he was so jealous of his

heart, that he suspected that some wicked way would be overlooked, unless God prevented it. Now, this is the grand characteristic of "faith unfeigned:" it is impartial, and willing to be kept back from all sin. A real Christian may, indeed, feel a strong bias to some of his old sins, and a shrinking from some duties; and, alas! for a time he may even risk the experiment of serving "two masters" by turns; but when he finds—which he soon does by bitter experience,—that *half* measures will not do, and that a divided heart misses enjoyment in religion, and that yielding to temptation or sloth is destruction to hope and peace—he is glad to retrace his steps to the narrow way again, and to yield himself unreservedly to God and duty. Now, although this is not done without a struggle, nor always soon—it is done, eventually, by all who are attentive to their own hearts, and to the baneful influence of *inconsistencies* upon them. The self-examining believer determines to be consistent whatever it costs in effort or sacrifice. He would rather *suffer*, than sin against God and a good conscience. Now, this high and holy tone of gracious principle and godly practice, is acquired chiefly by scrutinizing the heart in the presence of God. It is not acquired from the social intercourse of Christian friends, nor even from heart-searching sermons: these, indeed, suggest the necessity of self-examination, and are the chief means of leading to it; but it is in the *act* of devotional examination, that God shows with "power" what is wrong, and with "glory" what is right. Accordingly, it was in the closet, and whilst retired within ourselves, and whilst realizing the presence of God, and whilst looking at all sin in the light of eternity—it was whilst thus engaged, that every sin, fault, and wrong habit, rose before us in hideous and horrid deformity! Then we wept, and wondered that we ever thought lightly of "any wicked way;" and felt our souls swelling up in holy indignation against all vice and vanity.

And, by the same process, we acquired those clear and affecting views of the way of holiness, which won us into it.

Whilst we looked at “the narrow way,” in the company of those who shun it, or in the light of worldly maxims, we thought it *too* narrow, and saw many lions in the way, and felt as if it were impossible to walk in it: but when we retired to our closets, and betook ourselves to prayer, that we might examine and weigh these mingled feelings and objections, which looked so formidable in company—the path of holiness expanded before us as it really is—guarded by eternal Providence, gilded with great and precious promises, graced by the presence of many illustrious pilgrims, glorious with the footsteps of the Saviour himself, and terminating directly in the heaven of heavens. We saw, also, that none sank on “the way everlasting,” nor perished at the end of it, who kept in it; and that those were happiest who adhered to it most strictly; and that all were ruined who forsook it; and, between this twofold “cloud of witnesses,” we resolved to follow holiness. Thus, we have often come from our closets, saying to ourselves, “Let whoever will, try dangerous experiments, the example of the Saviour shall be our guiding pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night: our hearts are ‘fixed’ by searching, and we will ‘follow the Lamb in the path of regeneration.’”

It is thus that the habit of devotional self-examination sets and keeps both sin and duty in their true light. It is, however, wanted for other purposes. Accordingly, God says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your ownelves; know ye not your ownelves, how that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates:” that is, without proof of the Saviour’s presence. The word “Reprobates” is not used here in the modern sense. It means now, in common language, “reckless profligates,” or “abandoned sinners;” and is suspected by some, who judge the sense from the sound of it, to countenance the doctrine of *Reprobation*, as they call it. They mean by that, the ruin and loss of the soul by the sovereign *decree* of God;—a doctrine not even breathed in the Bible. What it teaches, is, the *judicial* reprobation of those who weary out the patience of

God by impenitence and rebellion. Such he abandons eventually to a reprobate mind, and to a seared conscience, and to their own heart's lusts; and thus to ruin. But the ruin comes not from a sovereign decree, but from the sentence of the law and the sanctions of the Gospel. This is the real state of the case; and therefore a man is not a reprobate in *this* sense, even if he is not in the faith yet, and although Christ is not in him. I mean, that he is not, on that account, *decreed* to ruin, nor given up by God. All unbelievers are, indeed, condemned already; but it is because of unbelief, and not beyond redemption.

This being understood, the most timid have no occasion to shrink from examining themselves by the test applied to the Corinthians; for even if you should not be able to prove, to your own satisfaction, that you are in the faith, nor that Christ is in you—still, whilst Christ is upon the throne of grace, and whilst faith is the gift of God, your case is not hopeless. This, however, is but the lowest view of the case. Those who are in real earnest to be found in Christ, are not utter strangers either to the exercise of faith or to the indwelling of Christ in the heart. They may be afraid to call their own believing faith; and may not understand the precise meaning of Christ's indwelling presence: but it does not follow, from these mistakes, that they are without proofs of faith or love. They have often more proofs of both than they imagine, or are aware of, until they examine themselves.—Now, so may you. The first sight of the question, "Am I in the faith?" may startle you; because, knowing faith to be the point on which salvation turns, and feeling your own unworthiness of so great a salvation, you are afraid to say "*Yes*." But, observe:—you are equally afraid to say "*No*." You leave the question unanswered in words; but you continue to *act* as if you were "in the faith." You do not cease to hope, even when you hesitate to say that you believe. You even strive to *live* as a believer, although you do not venture to assume the name. Yea, more: no one could persuade you

to give up your habits of looking to, and leaning upon, the Saviour. You shrink with horror from the bare idea of disowning or deserting him. You have no wish to forsake him ; and when you feel tempted to do so, your unfeigned answer is, " Lord, to whom shall I go ? Thou only hast the words of eternal life." Accordingly, since you saw your need of an interest in his blood, and felt the value of salvation, you have been unwilling and unable to forget Christ.—Thoughts of him, and desires after him, have followed you like your shadow, more or less every day ; and nothing would please you more than to be able to think and feel in regard to him, as you wish.

Well ; this being the case, you cannot begin too soon to " examine " whether you " be in the faith ; " for the result is sure to be favourable. Yes ; examination in the sight of God will discover to you, that it has been given to you, on behalf of Christ, to believe on him with the heart unto salvation. But nothing else will discover this, to your *permanent* satisfaction. You may gather, from these marks of faith, a general idea that you are in the faith ; but the conclusion, even if just, will not last long. It must be drawn upon your knees, and with your heart bared to the inspection of God, if you would have it lasting. And, in his presence, as in the prospect of death, the question, "*Am I in the faith ?*" is fairly met. The soul dare not trifle nor equivocate, when placed under the eye of Omniscience ; but must go fully into the inquiry. It spreads and pours itself out, all over the question. And when, in this light, it is seen that the cordial belief of the Gospel, for holy purposes, is saving faith ; and when it is felt, through all the soul, that we do believe its truth, and love its holiness ;—our satisfaction is unspeakable ! For then, we know and feel persuaded that we are not flattering ourselves, nor judging rashly. The whole matter is so fully laid before God, and God is so fully before our minds, that self-deception seems impossible. We have " the witness " in ourselves, that, like the first believers, we " gladly receive " the Gos-

pel. We are, indeed, amazed, and thrown into almost breathless silence, during these hallowed moments, to find that believing is faith, and that faith itself warrants the hope of salvation *there* and *then*. But we *do* find all this to be true! All our recollections, both of the letter and spirit of the Scriptures, rush in to confirm it. 'The whole Bible rises before us as one brilliant and unbroken illustration of the grand fact—that salvation "is of faith, that it might be by grace." And, having seen all this in the light of the Divine presence, we retire from our closets with the old apostolic melody in our hearts and lips, "*Therefore, being justified by faith, WE have peace with God.*"

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## No. IX.

### THE TEMPTATIONS AND FIERY DARTS OF SATAN.

AMONGST those words with which the truly serious associate the most awful and alarming ideas, the word TEMPTATION is one of the chief. And well it may make every ear tingle, and every heart tremble! Temptation is, indeed, thought of, and spoken of, lightly, by the bulk of mankind: but this is no proof that they who do so are superior to it, or that they resist it. Many strong men—yea, many mighty men—have fallen by it. Men! yea, ANGELS, have been overthrown by it in the very heaven of heavens. Even their immortal powers and celestial advantages were not a sufficient balance to the weight of temptation. Like a serpent, it wound itself around the pillars of their thrones of light, coiled its folds upon their harps of gold, crept into their bosom; and having thus drawn aside a third part of the stars of heaven, it hurled them, at one sweep, into "the blackness of darkness for ever." The man, therefore, who thinks so lightly of temptation as not to be afraid of it,

ought to place himself, in idea, amongst those once "morning stars," whilst they shone around the eternal throne as emanations of the Father of lights, and served him day and night without weariness : and whilst witnessing them singing and shining in their bright orbits, and all linked unto God as if they had been rays of his glory ; he would then see and feel what strength, what motives, what innocence, *temptation* could overmatch and overwhelm. And then, let him look to the dark and desolate orbits of those falling morning stars ; to their present chains of darkness, and to their future prospects : and if, after this survey of heaven and hell, he is still not afraid of temptation, he must surely suspect that he is *less* than a man, or fancy himself to be *more* than an angel.

All this, however, although the strongest, is not the most affecting light in which to view our own danger from temptation. Which of the mightiest human names has not temptation left a stain and a stigma upon ? Noah ?—Ah, you recollect his wine. Abraham ?—His equivocation. Moses ?—His impatience. Aaron ?—His unbelief. Jacob ?—His stratagem. The Patriarchs ?—Their treatment of Joseph. Elijah ?—His murmuring. David ?—His fall. Hezekiah ?—His ostentation. Jonah ?—His rebellion. Peter ?—His denial of Christ. And if these mighty men fell, let him that standeth take heed lest *he* fall also. Let not him that putteth on the harness, boast himself as he who putteth it off. We shall not be fully beyond the reach of all danger, until we are fairly through the valley of the shadow of death ; for even in it, the fiery darts of Satan sometimes fly thick, and flash dreadfully. Only when we are "clean over" the swellings of Jordan, will there be "nothing" in us for Satan to work upon.

Were, indeed, simplicity of heart, and gracious principles, preventives, or absolute safeguards, against all temptations, some might escape ; but even *innocence*, in Eden, was not an effectual shield against the fiery darts of Satan. Innocence ! even incarnate *divinity*, was not ex-

empt from assault, though superior to seduction; for the Saviour was assailed and harassed by Satan, until his human nature required angels to minister unto its exhausted strength.

Some who readily subscribe to the truth of all this, do it for a bad purpose, and argue thus:—"If such men fell, we cannot be expected to stand always, nor to exceed them in resisting the devil." But this is mere sophistry and self-deception; for those who fell, fell by no necessity but what they themselves created. Satan has power to say, "Cast thyself down!" but he has not power to *throw* down any one who is doing "all to stand." Had Noah been as watchful after planting a vineyard, as before, he would not have fallen by wine. Had David made and kept such "a covenant with his eyes" as Job did, he would not have coveted his "neighbour's wife." Had Peter confined himself to the company of his fellow-disciples, he would not have been in the same danger of denying his Master with *oaths*, as when he mingled with the enemies of Christ. Besides, one chief cause of the fall of these, otherwise, good men, was that they evidently never allowed themselves to suspect that they were in *danger* of falling by such temptations. It is highly probable, that had any one warned them against the sins which overcame them, each of them would have said, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Thus, there are two things necessary, in order to resist temptation successfully;—doing all to stand, and being afraid of falling; for if we are not afraid of falling, we shall not take unto ourselves "the *whole* armour of God," that we may be "able to stand."

Amongst those temptations of Satan to which we are chiefly exposed, and which are emphatically his "fiery darts," one is, the temptation to ATHEISM or INFIDELITY. Now, whenever the horrid suspicion that there is "no God," or that the Bible is not to be depended on, comes in like a flood upon the mind, it is a fiery dart of Satan; and he alone has the *guilt* of it, whilst the mind hates or de-

plores it. Unless, indeed, we have been exposing ourselves by reading skeptical books, and listening to scorners; then, the guilt of infidel thoughts is chiefly our own. But when they are thrown into the soul, unsought and unawares, and thrown after the soul when it is retreating from them,—the *archer*, and not the “wounded spirit,” is the criminal, in that case. We are personally accountable only for those temptations which we court, connive at, or yield to. The Saviour was tempted of the devil to impatience, presumption, and idolatry; but as he had not exposed himself to these fiery darts, and did not yield to them, but repelled them, he was nowise accountable for them.

This distinction is strongly stated; but it is wanted, in all its strength, when the mind is overwhelmed by distracting doubts of the being of God or the truth of Revelation. In that case, it seems to ourselves improbable, if not impossible, that we had ever believed “with the heart;” seeing, that now, we are almost ready to give up faith in God, and to regard all things as a chaos of mere chance! We argue thus: “Surely, if I had been taught by the Spirit of God, and at all renewed in the spirit of my own mind, I should be incapable of harbouring or starting such atheistical thoughts. They would not surely come into ‘a new heart.’ Are they not symptoms of a reprobate mind?” This, however, is a mistake; they are “the fiery darts” of Satan, and not the *real* sentiments of our own minds. Accordingly, we do not think these doubts well-founded. We do not wish them to be *true*. Nothing would pain us so much as finding that there was no God, or no Bible, or no Hereafter! However much, therefore, we may be harassed by these dark suspicions, they are not our sin, but our misfortune, so long as we shrink from them, and try to shake them off. At the same time, we are not *altogether* blameless in this matter; for, had we acquainted and familiarized ourselves more fully with the EVIDENCES of natural and revealed religion, Satan would not have found it so easy to unsettle our thoughts. Hence the importance of

preventing the return of this temptation, by acquiring a more full and connected view of the grounds of faith.

Another "fiery dart" of Satan is, the temptation to **BLASPHEMY**. Now, although every thing is not blasphemy, which is called so by custom, we are not wrong in regarding, as blasphemous, all those thoughts which *impeach* the character or the government of God. There are things in both which clash with our natural ideas of propriety; and, when they clash with our inclinations too, Satan can so magnify what we *dislike* in the Divine character and government, that we are in great danger of thinking and speaking against God. "I do well to be angry," said Jonah, when God caused his gourd to wither. "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain," said Asaph, when he saw that the "ungodly" prospered in the world, and that he himself was "chastened every morning." Now all these things happen still, and Satan turns them into strong temptations when they happen to ourselves. The gourds of our shelter and solace wither sometimes in the night, and *we* are left exposed and lonely, whilst the gourds of the ungodly are almost evergreens: or *our* plans and undertakings are unsuccessful, whilst those who have no fear of God before their eyes, seem to have every thing their own way, and sometimes more than heart could wish. Thus, between the apparent inequalities of Providence and our own actual sufferings, we are tempted to murmur, and, at times, almost to arraign the *justice* of God. Indeed, there are moments of such agitation, when Satan aggravates these calamities, that the heart seems to harden under them, and the soul to become reckless of consequences. Who has not felt that fiery dart flash across a wounded spirit—"Let God do his worst, for I cannot be more miserable than I am already?" These are awful moments, when the soul is almost ready to take its swing amongst all the risks of time and eternity, and, like the "unjust judge," to give up both the fear of God and regard for man! Oh! it is well that, when Satan comes in such "great wrath," his time is short: and it

is *better*, that the good Shepherd holds his tempted and terrified sheep so, that the roaring lion cannot devour them, nor pluck them out of their Shepherd's hand.

At such moments, indeed, we hardly venture to regard ourselves as the sheep of Christ: we seem to ourselves *goats*, going to his "left hand," of our own accord, and "before our time." Accordingly, it is not until we come to our "right mind" again, that we can even join his flock in the green pastures of Zion. "But," it may be said, "can any sheep or Lamb of the Saviour's flock sink into such reckless desperation, even for a moment?" Perhaps, not *sink* into it; but they may be *goaded* into it by the fiery darts of Satan. Indeed, when the character of God comes to be judged of by his trying *dispensations*, instead of his dispensations being judged of by his *character*, Satan finds that in the heart to work upon, which can soon wind it up to desperation. Those who have never seen much of real life, or never looked at it closely, may be astonished at this. It is, however, only too true: and hence the necessity of a settled conviction in our minds, that God must not be judged of by our trials. Job saw and felt this, when he said, "Though he slay *me*, yet will I trust in him." And we have always reason to do so, whatever be our calamities; for, even when he chastises in anger, the anger is not mixed with *hatred*, but with love. Whenever, therefore, Satan suggest, from our afflictions, any reflection or charge against the Divine character, we ought immediately to shut our hearts against it; and, as those who are conscious of loving God, to answer, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for all things work together for good to them that love God!"

It is not, however, in times of calamity only, that Satan hurls his fiery darts against the soul. The temptation to find fault with the SOVEREIGNTY of Grace, is often greatest when Providence is most smiling; at least, when it is not adverse. Satan seems, then, to envy the pleasure which the fearers of God find in the ways of God; and, as he cannot forge fiery darts out of their lot then, he often draws

them from the *decrees* of God. How far we ourselves are naturally prone to pry into "secret things," and to tamper with the abstract question of personal *election*, I do not stop to inquire now. One thing is certain, that, whether prone or averse, almost all serious minds get entangled more or less with the question at times. Who has not felt his thoughts drawn into some such track as the following:—  
 "True; I am now more reconciled to the salvation and service of God than I once was: I am even willing to walk in the narrow way which leadeth unto life;—but eternal life 'is not of him that *willeth*, nor of him that *runneth*, but of God that showeth *mercy*; and He will have mercy only upon whom he *will* have mercy.' If, therefore, I am not *elected*—neither my willing nor my running can avail me. I may be lost at last, whatever I do! Oh! why is *sovereignty* the rule of mercy?"

Whenever Satan can get the soul this length in questioning or suspecting the good will of God, he soon entangles it in a labyrinth of rash or dark speculations which harden or horrify the mind. I state this in general terms, because it would be improper to embody, in express words, all the dreadful surmises and charges against God, which rise up in the mind at such times. Those who have felt them, need no remembrancer, and those who are strangers to them cannot be too long ignorant of them. When, however, the question of personal election is borne in, and bound upon the soul, like a heavy chain, which checks and weighs down hope; and when "the iron enters into the soul," so that it knows not what to do or what to think;—the best thing which can be done in such a case is, to ask the simple question, "Has ever any one found out his own election by *brooding* over the matter as I am doing? Many have acquired a cheering persuasion that their names were "written in the Lamb's book of life:" did they obtain the hope of this by such a process as I am pursuing? I am afraid to pray, and have no heart to use the ordinary means of grace; because I am not sure what will be the issue.

Was this Paul's plan, was this the line of conduct which the apostles pointed out to inquirers? No! It cannot, therefore, lead me to the point I wish to reach. I have, indeed, instead of trying to enter into 'the secret of the Lord' by the 'door,' been trying to 'climb up some other way.' This is wrong!"

Are you, then, persuaded that it is wrong? Well; consider again, that none of all whom you have known to die in the Lord, or know to be the Lord's, had any knowledge of their election when they *first* fled to Christ, and began to follow him. Whatever they know now, they were, for a time, as ignorant on this point as you can be; and whatever they have found out, was discovered in the path of duty, and nowise apart from the use of the Scriptures. Ask them—and they will tell you so. Do you, then, really imagine that it is necessary, or that it would be wise to reveal to *you* a matter which, for a time, is kept hid from all the heirs of salvation? Must God, to humour your curiosity, alter his plan of acting under the gospel? The old and usual plan has done well enough for millions and myriads, who had both more to do and to suffer than you have. I do not underrate your trials nor your perplexities; but I must remind you that better soldiers have had to fight and die upon the bare ground of *hope*; so that, if you will not begin the spiritual warfare without assurance, you will never begin it at all.

Besides; do consider that, if you had the assurance of your own personal election, it would not alter the path of duty in the least. It would unbind nothing that is binding on Christians. It would not prevent trials, nor exempt you from temptations. It would, indeed, I grant, cheer you in the path of duty and suffering, to know that you were chosen and called to eternal life; and thus, although not absolutely necessary to your success, it is certainly desirable for your comfort. I will even go farther, and affirm, (for the Word of God bears me out in doing so,) that you will do and suffer the will of God better when you know

your election of God. But, if you really want to know it for *holy* purposes, it is not such a secret as you have hitherto imagined, nor as you were sure to find it, from the *way* you took to discover it.

In fact, it is *not* a secret at all, so far as it regards those who have fled to Christ for a holy salvation: they are the elect of God. All that "love God" are "the called according to his purpose." This is expressly *revealed*, for their satisfaction on the point. If, therefore, it be a secret to you, it is so, either because you have not observed this simple fact, or because you still doubt the sincerity of your own faith and love. The scriptural fact, however, is now before you; all true believers are the elect of God; and, therefore, whatever reason you have to regard yourself as a believer, is proof of your personal election. You have no occasion to perplex yourself with the abstract question, if you are conscious of loving God and the Lamb; for love to them settles the whole question in your case, and in all cases where love is genuine. What you have to do, therefore, is simply to ascertain the sincerity of your faith and love; and that may be soon done, if you take care to distinguish between *weakness* and *insincerity*, and between *imperfection* and *pretence*. Now, you know that your avowals of faith and love at the mercy-seat, and your desires for their increase, are not *pretences*, but the unfeigned language of your heart, addressed to the Searcher of hearts. Well; his language to you is express—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." And let this be your answer to all the counter-suggestions of Satan.

## No. X.

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FEELING  
AND ENJOYMENT.

THERE are few things more distressing or discouraging to a serious mind, than the unsteadiness of its own feelings. These change so often and so much, that we hardly know what to think of ourselves at times. We wish to be feelingly alive to the glories of the Saviour and salvation—to the solemnities of death and eternity—and to the claims of duty and devotion ; but, somehow, the impression of these great realities is not abiding.—It seems often “ready to vanish away” from our minds. And yet, at times, the impression of eternal things is very deep. Occasionally, it seizes upon, and sinks into, the heart so fully, that we could not *throw* it off if we would ; and yet it soon passes off, even against our will. We do not *intend* to forget divine things, nor to become formal in religious duties ; but, alas ! we often do both, and find ourselves almost estranged from God and godliness ; so treacherous and changeable is the human mind, even after it has felt much of the power of truth and eternity !

This melancholy fact naturally gives rise to a suspicion in our own breasts, that, whatever we have experienced, we are not yet truly converted to God ; for it seems impossible to reconcile these sad changes of feelings with the possession of “the root of the matter.” All our ordinary ideas of “a new heart and a right spirit,” include the necessity of more habitual steadiness of purpose and strength of spiritual feeling. Accordingly, our relapses into deadness and formality induce a doubt, if not of our sincerity, of our conversion ; and thus all our pleasing hopes, which were drawn from the consciousness of relying on Christ for a holy salvation, are almost upset, at times. They seem unwarranted in our case, because our

feelings are inconsistent with them, and with all our ideas of the saving work of the holy spirit upon the heart. The consequence is—we are often ready to conclude that we are too hasty in taking up the hope of salvation, and in giving ourselves credit for being converted characters. We are almost persuaded, at times, that it would have been better to have waited longer, before venturing to avow our religious feelings to the world or to the church. We may not exactly *repent* of having said that we were in good earnest about the salvation of our souls; but we have wished that we had said less, and thought more, on the subject.

In this painful dilemma many find themselves, and hardly know what to do or think in their own case. The sad unsteadiness of their religious feelings and resolutions *keeps* some back from the sacrament, and almost *forces* others away from it. One class are afraid to come, and another equally afraid to continue. The former are not easy in their absence from it, nor the latter easy in their attendance on it; and both, whilst in this unhappy state of mind, derive but little benefit from the other ordinances of grace.

Such being the fact of this case, it is of immense importance to both classes, that the subject of Fluctuating Religious Feelings should be cleared up to them without reserve or delay. It is, however, a subject equally delicate and difficult; for any view of it which would lead the serious to think lightly of the evil of dead or cold frames of mind, would do far more injury than these frames themselves. For, bad as they are in themselves, and in their influence upon Christian character, they are not so baneful as a heedless disregard to the state of the heart. He who trembles at the treachery of his own heart, is *humbled*, as well as hindered, by it; whereas he who is reconciled to a vacant mind and a worldly spirit, and thus, reckless how he feels, is sure to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. The mourner over the plagues of his own

heart will, at least, not increase them ; but the man who regards them as mere matters of course, and thus allows them to take their swing, will soon bring them out from the centre of his heart to the surface of his life.

Such being my own personal convictions, and, as far as I can ascertain it, the actual result of general experience on this subject, I am not likely to lessen either your fear or hatred of those melancholy changes of feelings which now pain and perplex you. I cannot, indeed, join with you in regarding them as utterly incompatible or inconsistent with the existence of saving faith in the heart ; but I am fully prepared to regard them, in reference to the spiritual health of the soul, as indicating, what similar bodily symptoms imply, the presence of *disease*. Now, all is not right, but much wrong, with the body, when there is a frequent loss of appetite, or a loathing of natural food, or a disposition to lethargy. In each of these cases there is abundant reason for fear and care. Accordingly, we are both fearful and careful, when such symptoms show themselves. But, even when they are most alarming, we never imagine that they disprove the *former* existence of life or health. Such an idea is too absurd to be admitted for a moment. Well ; in like manner, the loss of spiritual appetite and relish does not prove that we never had any. In fact, it just proves the contrary : for, as we know from having enjoyed bodily health, that there is a change for the worse when appetite fails ; so the felt and deplored loss of relish for divine things, proves that they were once enjoyed by the soul. Hence Job's piercing lamentation, "*Oh, that it were with me as in months past !*" is as much proof that "the candle of the Lord" *had* shone upon him, as that it was then eclipsed.

Parallels between natural and spiritual life and health are, I am fully aware, hazardous grounds of argument when the object is to ascertain a point so solemn as the conversion of the soul to God ; for almost any bodily action or emotion proves the existence of natural life to a certainty :

whereas there may be many *moral* feelings, which although they resemble spiritual feelings in some things, do not amount to spiritual life. There are, perhaps, very few persons amongst those who have sat under a faithful ministry of the Gospel, who have not felt both alarmed and allured, at times, by the appeals of the pulpit. It is not even uncommon to find persons completely enraptured, for some months or weeks, with a ministry which is full of Christ and grace, and so spiritual withal, that it seems impossible to love it, without loving the Saviour at the same time. But all this, we know, may be done without even leading to secret prayer. In like manner, it is quite possible to take a very lively interest in religious duties, and to be much pleased, for a considerable time, with prayer-meetings and spiritual conversation : and yet to remain unregenerate all the time. This is often proved, by the return of such persons to their old habits of indifference and neglect. But here is the difference between them and the truly serious :—the former are not sorry to give up their new habits, nor unwilling to return to their old ways ; but rather glad than otherwise, to rid themselves of religious restraints : whereas the latter cannot bear the idea of going back to the world, nor feel easy when their hearts are becoming worldly. There may be sad changes for the worse in the state of their feelings ; but these make their heart sad, and humble them before God. They count it not gain, but a heavy, heavy *loss*, to get free from the holy influence of any religious principle or motive. It is no pleasure to them, but an acute pain, to feel that either the Gospel or the Law is losing any of its authority over them. In a word, it is their chief burden and terror to feel less affected by divine things than at first.

Now, when this is the real state of the case, and when, in connexion with this sense of loss and sin, there is a deep desire to return to the love and liveliness of former days, the changes do not disprove the reality of the faith or conversion of such mourners in Zion. Lukewarmness and the loss of relish in the service of God and the Lamb, prove,

indeed, *much* against such mourners ; but they do not prove them to be unbelievers, far less hypocrites. Bad frames of mind demonstrate that there has been some bad habit or temper indulged, or not sufficiently watched against ; and that there has been some want of prayer and prudence, and some yielding to sloth, or tampering with temptation ; and any of these causes of heartlessness are reasons for deep shame and humiliation, but not for *despair*. Despair can only make all that is bad, worse, and all that is discouraging, desperate ; because its direct tendency is to harden the heart.

But whilst it is true that bad frames of spirit are never wholly unconnected with remissness of some kind, it is equally true that both they and their practical causes are connected with some misapprehension of the Gospel itself. There has been something *doctrinal* forgotten, or mistaken, or overlooked, as well as something *practical* neglected, whenever lukewarmness or disrelish takes possession of the heart. Either the *object* of faith, or the *law* of faith, is in some degree lost sight of or misunderstood, when the followers of the Lamb are heartless and formal. This is self-evident : because it is impossible for any man to believe that he himself is redeemed by the blood of Christ, and thus made a child of God, and yet remain *unfeeling* towards God and the Lamb. Accordingly, so long as we venture to cherish the fond hope that we are “accepted in the Beloved,” we are not unfeeling in heart, nor formal in obedience. It is when we forget or doubt that we are “justified by faith,” that we cease to have “peace with God,” and sink into heartlessness in his service ; and therefore, the grand evangelical fact, that his “righteousness is *upon all* that believe,” should never be forgotten or doubted by any one who is relying on Christ for a holy salvation. It is the *duty* as well as the privilege of all who have committed their souls to Christ to believe that they *are* justified by believing on him ; because, in no other way can they ever obtain the joy of salvation. In fact, there is no other way ;

for whatever the Holy Spirit does in producing that joy, he does it by opening up this revealed truth to the mind, and enabling the soul to believe it in its own behalf. And this belief, although not essential to *acceptance* with God, is essential to "peace with God," and to the maintenance of a feeling heart in his service; for no one can feel aright in all things, who does not believe aright in all those things which "belong to our peace."

If, therefore, you never understood clearly this part of the Gospel, nor saw, in the *handwriting* of God, your own warrant to regard yourself as a child of God, it is no wonder that your best frames and feelings have not been lasting. How could they last under the weakening and wasting influence of suspense? What was there to maintain them in lively exercise, whilst you could not lay your hand upon the written promise of your own salvation? Seeing the *possibility* of being saved, is, indeed, a "great sight," which may well awaken whole trains of sweet and solemn feelings in the bosom of a trembling sinner; but these cannot last long in their *sweetness*, unless he see too the *probability* of being saved. Even the *desire* of salvation, which is, perhaps, the most powerful feeling of a serious mind, must lose much of his power, if it can lay hold on nothing stronger than a "*peradventure*" to gratify it. The soul craves for more—the conscience needs more, than a *maybe* to satisfy them. Accordingly, if they are not satisfied, they soon fall asleep again, or return to their old portion.

Here, then, is one great cause of the decline of spiritual relish;—the spiritual appetite, when hungering and thirsting for salvation, is not taken direct to the Gospel for satisfaction, but tantalized by mere peradventures. Indeed, even *prayer* itself fails to keep up a happy frame of mind, when the mind has nothing else to look to but the bare probability of an eventual answer. Accordingly, if you have been doing nothing more than praying for salvation, it is really no wonder that your enjoyment has been both small and unsteady. Not, indeed, that you have prayed too much; that

is impossible; but because you have *believed* too little. God answers prayer by blessing his own WORD to the soul; and therefore it is as necessary to "search the Scriptures," as it is to cry for mercy. But if, instead of combining with prayer the study of the Gospel, that you might thus understand the salvation you have been seeking, you have gone on expecting that the pardon, and peace, and joy, which you wanted, would be infused, in some mysterious way, into your heart—your disappointment is a matter of course; for you did not take God's plan of succeeding; and the consequence is, the darkness and deadness which you complain of. In fact, confining the pursuit of salvation to prayer alone, is almost enough to bring prayer itself to a speedy and final end; for no man will persist long in fervent prayer, if, after many strong cries and tears, he finds himself as far off as ever from hope and peace. He may not throw off the habit of it; but it will gradually fall off, if he gain nothing by it. Nor is this all the bad effect of disuniting *faith* from prayer; the man who, after much prayer for pardon and peace, finds no sense, nor symptom, of either in his mind, is strongly tempted to abandon the pursuit as hopeless, and to suspect that God has singled him out as an *exception* to the rule, that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." And when this dark suspicion sets in upon his mind, it soon gives birth to still darker thoughts and feelings. And even when disappointment does not occasion such horrid suspicions, it wears out the spirit of prayer, and weighs down all the best feelings of the heart. The sad reflection, "I obtain no answers to my prayers, and find no enjoyment in them now!" almost cuts the cords which first bound the soul to "the horns of the altar." And when such, or indeed any considerations, alienate the soul from secret devotion, they soon alter its gracious feelings and habits.

Now, it is thus, chiefly, that matters go wrong in the heart of the serious; they miss enjoyment by overlooking part of the Gospel, and thus lose much of their first love

and liveliness. Other oversights concur, indeed, with this one, in producing and prolonging a low state of piety in the soul; and nothing can restore the soul to spiritual health, which does not correct these practical oversights, and lead to watchfulness and diligence. Nothing, however, can restore the soul to the joy of salvation, or to the power of godliness, but the Holy Spirit, by leading you "into all truth," for, until you have a personal hold upon the great salvation, it cannot have a permanent influence upon your heart. Now, such a hold of it you have either not obtained, or you have lost it; and, whichever be the case, there is only one way of obtaining it,—namely, by the *belief* of all the truth. Watchfulness, without believing, will not make the heart happy, nor "right with God:" prayer, without believing, will not restore the joy of salvation. They may produce a state of mind and character, so devout, and humble, and upright, that, by reasoning from effects to *causes*, you may venture to conclude that your salvation is begun, and thus get hold of it by inference. It was thus, most likely, that you acquired your first hope and joy of salvation; the loss of which you now deplore. You then felt as you had never done before, and found such a change of heart and habits taking place in you, and were conscious of such a willingness to be indebted and devoted to the Saviour, that you could hardly doubt the reality of your conversion. Accordingly, from thus seeing and feeling the work of the Spirit *within* you, you ventured to conclude that the work of Christ was *for* you. Because you thought that the Holy Spirit had "quickened" you, you hoped that the Saviour had "died for" you; and because certain marks of effectual calling were showing themselves in your heart and life, you ventured to regard them as some evidence of being "called according to the purpose" of God.

It was, perhaps, somewhat in this way, that you obtained whatever hold of salvation you got for yourself at first; and, could you see all those marks of grace about yourself again, you would feel warranted and encouraged to take

down your harp from the willows, and sing again the New Song: but as some of these marks are almost gone, and all of them more or less decayed, you dare not sing as in the days of old, nor even hope as formerly. But now, if this really be a true copy of your past and present views and feelings, does it not occur to you, on looking at the copy, that you have, all along, had but *confused* ideas of the Gospel? You seem, indeed, to have believed it cordially as far as you understood it; but it does not seem that you ever studied it *half* so much as you did the frames of your own mind. You must have looked chiefly into and at *yourself*, for a warrant to hope in Christ. Do consider this fact. According to your own account of the matter, you have, since you began to think seriously, been much in the habit of marking the workings of your own mind, and the meltings of your own heart; and when you found them of a holy and humble character, you began to think that you were then warranted, and almost welcome, to hope in Christ for your own salvation; but now that you feel less spiritual and contrite, you are afraid to hope.

Now really, if this be the real state of the case with you, you have misunderstood the Gospel *more* than I have hitherto supposed you to have done. For do you not see, that, in all your reasonings from *effects* to *causes*, your own feelings, and not God's invitations, have been made your chief warrant for hoping in Christ. This is self-evident, seeing that, now your tenderness of feeling is gone, you are afraid to hope;—a plain proof that you have studied your own heart far more than the word of God. What he *says* concerning the ground and warrant of hope, has had less of your attention than what you *felt* towards religion in general. Now, although you did not, and, indeed, could not, feel too much, you have made a wrong use of your best feelings, in thus making them your chief encouragement in hoping for salvation; for they are no part of the ground of hope, nor, in themselves, of its warrant. "BEHOLD *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*" is

both the only ground and warrant of hope which the Scriptures contain. Nor is any thing more necessary; for as the blood of the Lamb answers all the demands of the law, so the word of the Lamb warrants all who are looking to Him alone for acceptance with God, to believe that they *are* accepted. 'This is the Gospel! "He that believeth, is justified from all things." "He that believeth *hath* eternal life." If, therefore, you are conscious that, notwithstanding all your mistakes and relapses, your real design was and is to rely upon Christ alone, that you might become like Christ; you too are warranted, by the direct authority of God, to believe that you are a partaker of that salvation which you were, just now, afraid to hope for. And if you are astonished to find the matter brought to this much desired, but unexpected issue, do remember that it is only saying, in other words, that eternal life is "the free gift of God" to them who believe in Christ. Consider these things, and they will soon restore all your best feelings, and place them upon a firmer basis than ever they stood on before.

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No. XI.

THE CAUSES OF BACKSLIDING.

ONE great cause of backsliding is the *uncertainty* which many of the serious allow to rest upon the question of their own faith in Christ. They never were *sure* that they were believers. They wished to be so—tried to be so, and hoped that, eventually, they should prove to be so. This may be your case. You were quite sure, when you began to follow Christ, that a great change had taken place in your heart and habits, and in your views and feelings;—so

great, that you could not but regard it, then, as the beginning of that "good work" which God has promised to carry on. Accordingly, under this sweet persuasion, you began to act as a believer, and to apply to yourself all the *commands* which are enjoined upon believers. Thus, in reference to *duty*, you cast in your lot with the people of God, and willingly came under all their peculiar obligations; and the readiness with which you did so, at that time, was no small proof to yourself, and others, that you were the subject of a divine charge. You were even glad to find that you were no longer unwilling to follow holiness, nor averse to devotion. You wondered and wept that you had ever neglected them—and adored the grace which had put an end to that criminal negligence. Accordingly, you often felt sure that you could never relapse into your old state of mind; the bare idea of going back from the "narrow way" into the "broad way" again, was abhorrent to you. You could not believe that it was possible after all that you had seen and felt, to forsake the fountain of living waters, and return to the broken cisterns of sin or folly. But you have done so, and left both your "first love," and your "first work." You are now a backslider, and feel and confess that you are so.

Many causes, of course, concurred in producing this backsliding; and all the *moral* causes of it are well known to yourself. You can see, at a glance, how it began in the neglect of secret prayer; and how it went on by the neglect of self-examination; and how it settled into a kind of apostacy of heart from God and godliness, by an undue attention to the world, or by tampering with forbidden things. Your heart condemns you—and "*God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things!*" The case, however, although both lamentable and criminal, is not hopeless. You have, indeed, almost given up God; but God has not given up you; so that there is still hope in Israel concerning this thing! For it is just as true that God "heals backslidings," as that he pardons sins;—just as

true that the backslider is welcome to return to Christ, as that any sinner is welcome to come to him. He who restored Peter will not reject you, when you seek him with all your heart. The Saviour is, in fact, *more* unwilling to give you up finally, than you are to be given up by him.

Such being the real state of the case, the first question is, of course, How must you return? Now there is not one way for UNBELIEVERS to *come* to God, and another for BACKSLIDERS to *return* to God; but the way in which you came, is the only way in which you can return. Both unbelievers and backsliders have "access to God," only "by the blood of Christ;" but in that way, whosoever cometh, or returneth, he will in no wise cast out. In a word, backsliders can only be restored in the same way that sinners are justified—by *believing* in Christ for salvation.

Now, if you intend to try again this way of access to God, see to it, I beseech you, that the question of your believing is not left in the doubtful state in which you allowed it to remain, when you first attempted to believe with the heart; for if you leave it unsettled or uncertain, you will soon backslide again. You cannot go on well in the ways of God, until you *know* that you are a believer. All your former backslidings arose, more or less, out of your former uncertainty on this point. They had, indeed, other and *worse* causes; but this, too, was a cause. And in this way;—not being sure that you were a believer, you were not, and could not be, sure that you had any *right* to the comfort of the great and precious promises. Accordingly you were afraid, even in your best days, to apply them freely to yourself. I mean, you did not, and durst not, even then, apply the promises to your own case, as you applied the *laws* of the Gospel. You were quite sure that it was your bounden duty to regard all the commandments of God as the rule of your life; but you were not sure that it was your *privilege* to regard all the promises of God as the portion of your soul. You pleaded, indeed, the promises in the name of Christ, and hoped that God would fulfil them in your experience;

but you often doubted whether he would do so, and felt that you had no certain hold on Him or them. The consequence of all this was, that the Gospel had not a firm hold upon you; and therefore, when temptation came, you were not fully prepared to resist it. You could not say, "I am a child of God, and must not give way to it—an heir of salvation, and need not be vanquished by it." Temptation, therefore, had nothing to contend with, but a sense of duty and interest; and this it overcame.

It is of immense importance to understand this point clearly. You were quite sincere, and not unhappy, when you began to follow Christ: salvation was your supreme object; and the hope of obtaining it, sooner or later, was the joy of your heart.

You did not, however, expect to obtain it soon; but laid your account with years, perhaps of diligence, before you could make your calling and election sure. And, at first, you were not unwilling to pursue the assurance of salvation at this expense of diligence. You thought, and rightly too, that the witness and seal of the Spirit would amply repay all the pains taken to obtain them. However, before they *could* come, you had begun to go astray. Neither your diligence nor delight lasted long. They did not, indeed, pass away so rapidly as the early cloud, or the morning dew; but they did pass away sooner than you could have imagined it possible for them. Now remember, and mark—just in proportion as your *delight* in the ways of God declined, your *diligence* abated; and, exactly as both declined, your doubts of the reality of your *conversion* multiplied. Accordingly it was not as a child of God—not as a believer—not even in the character of a convert—that you departed from God; but, in leaving him, you suspected that you had never belonged to Him. You, most likely, even palliated your backslidings to yourself, by the consideration that you had either never avowed yourself to be a true convert, or had not been sure of it in your own mind. Your backsliding did not, therefore, appear to you as the departure of a *child*

from a father, but of a *servant* from a master. You felt, indeed, that you were risking your soul more than ever; but you felt too that it had never been safe. Thus, you had not all, nor the best, motives of a *conscious* believer to restrain you. You had, indeed, motives which *ought* to have restrained you, and which *would* have done so, if they had been kept steadfastly in view; and it is but your sin and shame, that you lost sight of them: but still, you had not that magnetic motive which confirmed the souls of the first disciples—"We loved him because he first loved us." Any love you had to the Saviour arose either from the consideration of his general love to the world, or from the hope that he might, one day, manifest his love to you; and, as the manifestation which you looked for did not come, the diligence which you began with did not go on.

Now, if this was the real state of the matter in your case, thus, it is evident, it will be again, unless you get under the influence of the *peculiar*, as well as the common, motives which bind the soul to Christ and holiness. In returning to God, therefore, see to it—that it is by believing in Christ that you may "*be justified by the faith of Christ.*" Your first approaches to the Saviour came short of this. "The end" of whatever faith you exercised then, was the remote, not the immediate, salvation of your soul: whereas you are warranted, and welcome, immediately upon committing your soul to Christ for a holy salvation, to believe that you "*shall be saved;*" for God accepts at once, and Christ keeps for ever, all who believe with the heart unto righteousness. Credit this, therefore, in your own case; and thus, although future backsliding will not be rendered impossible, it will be far less likely to occur.

There is, however, a class of backsliders who never went so far, either in believing or obeying the Gospel, as in the case just stated. They knew something of the way of salvation, and, for a time, felt so much of its value, that they could not neglect secret prayer, nor pray without tears. They were often quite overcome, both in their closets and

in the sanctuary, with sweet or solemn impressions of divine and eternal things. Their hearts melted or warmed whenever they pondered on the great salvation. But now, all this holy susceptibility and deep feeling is lost, and with it, all the hope which it gave rise to. Accordingly, such persons, on looking back to their former state of mind, and contrasting it with the present, feel that they are backsliders in heart and life. The consciousness of this melancholy fact overwhelms them at times ; but when they think of returning to the Fountain of living waters, the want of their old feelings of love and relish discourages them. Hence the language of some is, " O that it were with me as in months past ! but I can neither feel nor pray now as I did then, and, therefore, I dare not hope. My soul no longer prospers, and therefore I can take no comfort from the promises. I have lost my first love, and now I can get no hold upon Christ for myself. I have departed from God, and God has, in anger, hid his face from me !"

Now this is certainly a deplorable case ; and whoever would treat it harshly has not the spirit of Christ. The sincerity and humility of the confession demand both respect and tenderness. There are, however, *mistakes* mixed up with it, which require to be corrected, even if some pain be incurred by the correction of them.

Now, when you say that " God has hid his face from you in anger," this implies that you once saw it in *love*, and enjoyed the light of his countenance. But is this really *true* ? Is it certain that what you once enjoyed, was the *divine* presence shining on your soul ? It is quite certain that you enjoyed *something* which was both pleasing and profitable to you at the time : of that there can be no doubt, seeing the memory of those happy moments is so dear to you, and the loss of them so deeply deplored by you. It is not, therefore, with any view of throwing discredit on your word, that I ask, Is it the *fact*, that God ever manifested himself to your soul as your Father and portion ? Every thing is not the divine presence which is

called so. What you felt then, may appear, when compared with your present darkness, the light of God's countenance; but you did not, perhaps, think it so then. Remember what was your opinion of that joy, when it was full, and whilst it lasted! Were you, then, sure that you had obtained salvation—sure that you were accepted in the Beloved—sure that you were passed from death to life? Did not your joy arise rather from a persuasion that you were in a *fair way* for finding mercy at last? Were you not quite as much pleased with your own good feelings and intentions, as with the Gospel? Was it not, chiefly, because you *felt* as you did, that you *hoped* as you did then? Remember, as minutely as you can, the precise character of your first love! I am not attempting to discredit its sincerity, but to ascertain how far it was influenced by faith in the atonement. What I want to get at in your case, is the degree in which your hopes and happiness arose from believing views of the blood of Christ. Now, you did not overlook that great atonement, nor presume to hope apart from its merits. In one sense, it was your only and final plea at the mercy-seat: but did you, even in your best days, think it a *sufficient* plea? When you pleaded it most fervently, did you feel it to be *enough*, in itself and by itself, to obtain for you acceptance with God? Did you see nothing between you and hell, but the cross?—and see that to be quite enough to save you from the wrath to come? Did you really believe or perceive, that nothing but *faith* was necessary in order to warrant hope? Did it ever occur to you, even when your faith was strongest, that your faith had saved you? Or, is it not the fact, that you attached far more importance to your feelings than to your faith? Be honest!—your believing went for little in your own estimation. You thought it the *least* part of your piety; and that, not because it was weak, but because you had very little faith in the use of faith itself, or did not regard your own believing as faith. What you believed, was the last thing you thought of, when examining the reality of

your religion; you laid the chief stress upon your tears, prayers, and holy desires, and hardly allowed any weight to your believing. This is self-evident; for you *still* believe all that you did then, and still think your belief of the Gospel of no consequence or real use. It gives you no comfort now, and therefore it was not *it* which comforted you then.

Surely all this forces upon you the suspicion, if not the conviction, that whatever you felt, even in your best days, you did not *understand* the way of salvation by faith well. For, do you not see, that if the atonement had really been the sole ground of your hope then, and if faith in it had been your hold on it, you could hope still, because you believe still all that you did then? You are changed for the worse in many respects, but your believing goes on as formerly, I mean—you *disbelieve* none of the truths which you believed then. You have as much faith in the *truth* of the Gospel as ever; but having less feeling, you attach no importance to it. You never laid much stress upon your believing, and now you think it of no use whatever.

The object of these remarks is, to convince you, that however sincere, warm, or pleasing, your former religious feelings were, you were, all along, very imperfectly acquainted with the way of salvation; indeed, so ignorant of it, that if all these feelings were restored in your heart, they would not prove you to be a believer. The loss of them proves that you are a backslider from much that was good and promising; but the revival of them, in all their original tenderness, would not constitute a child of God: for sinners are made "the sons of God, by faith in Christ Jesus;" whereas, in your creed, this grand principle of the Gospel has been overlooked or misunderstood. Or, if you have *talked* of salvation by faith, you must have meant, by faith, something more than the hearty belief of the truth concerning the person and work of Christ. Depend on it, therefore that you are not, and never have been, so *humble* as you imagine; for had you seen or believed that there was noth-

ing but the blood of the Lamb between you and perishing, you must have seen too, that the only way of escape is by trusting to that blood. Well—it is open to your confidence still ; and, if you are persuaded of the truth of its freeness and efficacy, why not trust in it at once !

Many other causes of backsliding might be (perhaps ought to have been) enumerated ; but the *moral* causes of it are so abundantly explained in other works, that it seemed better to confine this chapter to those mistakes, and to that uncertainty, upon the subject of a personal interest in Christ, which give such power to temptation, by leaving the mind unsatisfied, and unfortified with the hope of salvation.

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## No. XII.

### SANCTIFIED AFFLICTIONS.

THE perplexity of the serious is often increased, for a time, by their trials or calamities. And in this way : it seems hard, when we are willing and trying to do well in the service of God, to be hindered by an unusual weight of affliction. Such a hinderance we did not look for ; but almost calculated that *providence*, as well as grace, would smile upon us when we became the decided followers of the Lamb. We may not, indeed, have ventured to say so, in words, to ourselves ; but it was almost an understood thing, and taken for granted by us, that we should be in less danger than formerly. We intended to do so well, and to be so devoted to God, that it seemed unlikely that he would allow any thing to befall us, which was likely to hinder or unhinge us ; but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts on this point. He has allowed both trials and calamities to come upon us ; and these may be only the "the beginnings of sorrows."

But this, although painful, should not *surprise* us ; we had no warrant to calculate upon exemption from tribulation. In fact, we ought to have laid our account with passing through "many tribulations," from the time we began to walk in "the narrow way" to heaven. It was "*written*," that we should have to do so : it was obvious that all who had preceded us in the way to Zion, had done so. If, therefore, we flattered ourselves, in the face of all divine testimony and of all human experience, the flattery must have been almost wilful, and altogether inexcusable. "But no *strange* thing has befallen" us, however much we may be startled or staggered by our afflictions. We may see the same crosses on the shoulders of many of our brethren ; yea, and upon many who are strangers to God and godliness, and who have thus no resource in the day of calamity. Now if it be so hard to bear up under heavy trials, notwithstanding all that we know of the wisdom of God, and of the tenderness of the Saviour, how intolerable it must be to suffer without hope !

This is a view of our trials, which we ought never to lose sight of. They might have been sent whilst we were strangers to prayer and faith ; and, had they come before we fled to Christ, they might have hurried us on to desperation, or hardened our hearts against the Gospel. Weigh this solemn fact ! We should not have escaped from all afflictions, nor have had any security against our present sufferings, by continuing in "the broad way : " they might have overtaken us there ; or what is worse, God might have *cursed* us, by giving us our good things in this life. Now, if the mighty hand of God had struck us down whilst we were afar off from him, and unwilling to draw nigh to him, the consequences might have been fatal ; for, if we almost sink now, although we can cast our burden on the Lord, we must have been overwhelmed, if that burden had been laid upon us before we knew the Lord. And if, at times, it almost alienate some of our feelings from him, by its weight ; how easily might it have set all at the heart against him,

whilst our hearts were unregenerate ! This is not such an unusual effect of severe troubles as you may imagine. We, indeed, see many brought to their "right mind" by affliction ; and therefore we are apt to suppose that the natural tendency of it is to awaken the careless, and soften the obdurate ; but whenever affliction does so, it is not by its *natural* influence, but because it is overruled for good by grace. Accordingly, in those circles of life where the means of grace are neglected, and the Gospel unknown, the usual effect of trouble is to harden the heart against God, or to produce utter recklessness. There are, indeed, some pleasing exceptions to this melancholy fact, which occur ; but they are very few ; and no wonder. How could it, in the nature of things, be otherwise ? Affliction is well calculated to enforce whatever a man *knows* of God and salvation ; but, if he have grown up in ignorance of the things which belong to his "peace" it cannot *inform* him of these things. Accordingly, where they are not known beforehand, there is nothing in the mind to work upon, but its own powers and passions, and these are rather irritated than subdued by the rod. Had, therefore, our severest trials come upon us whilst we were ignorant and out of the way, the probability is, that they would have seared our conscience, and thus sealed our ruin.

Another reconciling consideration is—that our *former* trials have been positively useful to us. Our present affliction is not the first ; we have had the cup at our lips before, and if it be bitterer than before, there is still no *poison* in it. Hitherto it has proved salutary in every instance. Accordingly, we can trace an intimate connexion between certain trials and the formation of our religious character : they gave power and glory to our views of salvation and eternity, and brought our principles to the test ; and assisted in breaking up bad habits, and in bringing down bad tempers ; for, before we were afflicted, we "went astray." Upon our *devotional* character, especially, they have had a mighty influence. The *spirit* of prayer might

almost be said to have begun with the beginning of our sorrows ; we came so near to God, and unbosomed and unburdened our souls so fully to him, when his hand was first lifted up against us. We saw the “needs be” for the rod then, and acknowledged that in faithfulness he had afflicted us. Accordingly, on looking back to the devotional exercises of that time, and the devotional habits which grew out of them, we can truly say with David, “It was good for me that I was afflicted.” Now, with all this experience, why not expect similar good from your present afflictions? They are heavier—but they are from the same hand, and from the same heart too ; and therefore for the same gracious purpose.

“But they have not the same influence,” some may say ; “this stroke of the rod has quite stunned me. My spirit is so overwhelmed within me, and my mind so unhinged that I cannot pray nor meditate, nor do any thing aright. My former troubles endeared the mercy-seat and the means of grace, and seemed to bring with them the strength and the consolation required for bearing them well ; but this calamity has swept, like a whirlwind, all my best principles and feelings before it. Nothing rises in my heart but dark and horrid thoughts ; and when I try to pray them down, they rise more fiercely ! This is, indeed, a deplorable case ; but still, it is only the natural effect of the first pressure of heavy woes ; they unsettle and upset the mind for a time, and we ourselves aggravate their pressure by rash conclusions. One rash conclusion, which we are prone to draw, is—that we never can *get over* such a trial, nor be *ourselves* again. We feel sure of this, and say that it is impossible ever to surmount it, or to be happy again.

Perhaps this is your opinion of your own case. It is, however, a conclusion utterly unwarranted by Scripture or experience. Others have recovered from strokes of providence equally stunning. Asaph was quite as much overwhelmed as you are. Besides you are not prepared, whatever you may think at present, to *abide* by your own con-

clusion. It is not drawn from *all* the facts of the case. You are looking only to "the things which are seen, and temporal," and overlooking "the things which are unseen, and eternal," when you say that all is over in your case. For surely you have not made up your mind to brave and bear eternal separation from God and the Lamb! Surely you are not willing to abandon your *soul* to perdition, because your temporal interests are gone to wreck! You cannot look a ruined eternity in the face, and recklessly await its coming! Such horrid thoughts may, indeed, flash across your agitated spirit for a moment; but you dare not, cannot dwell upon them. Even if you indulge them for a moment, there is a *lurking* hope that it will not come to this: and even when you are most desperate, you are not prepared to affirm that God *cannot* bring you out of these deep waters.

Consider this; you are *not* prepared to throw your precious and immortal soul into the general wreck of your happiness. There is enough lost, without losing *that* too! Besides, you do not believe yourself, when you try to say to yourself, that all hope is for ever gone. Oh no! you may not see how you can be restored, but you know that restoration is not impossible. You dare not go the length of maintaining that God is your implacable and eternal enemy. You may say, "What can I think, seeing God has allowed all this to come upon me? Is not my calamity a token, not only of his anger and wrath, but of his *hatred*?" No! for grievous as it is, it is less than Job's; and in his there was no hatred at all. Besides, you once thought, and believed, that God was your *friend*. "Ah," you say, "it is the recollection of that hope which aggravates all my misery. I had begun to feel as a child, and to act as a child, towards the God of salvation: and I seemed, to myself, likely to do well in his service, until this came upon me." Indeed! upon what *grounds* did you then rest the hope of your sonship? Perhaps these grounds remain as open and firm as ever;—if they were scriptural grounds, they actu-

ally do. If, however, you took up the hope of salvation from the consideration that providence was smiling on you ; and thought God your Father, because your temporal lot pleased you, you were risking your soul in a refuge of lies ; and if so, your calamity is sent in *mercy*, to drive you for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel. But if you say, "It was not wanted for that ; all my hope of salvation and sonship was built, not on any thing in my temporal lot, or in my moral character, but wholly on the Rock of Ages ; Christ was all and all as the ground of my hopes : " if so, have you not known—have you not heard that Jesus Christ is "*the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ?*" Then all the grounds of your hope *do* remain the same as ever. 'The foundation standeth sure, whatever else is fallen.

Now the matter comes to a point ; for if it be the fact that your hopes were not founded on, nor influenced by, the *providential* tokens of Divine favour in your lot, but were derived solely from the person and work of Christ—the changes in your lot ought not to change hope into despair, seeing the foundation of hope is unchanged. But you say, "I am sadly changed to the worse." In what ? You wonder at this question, and are ready to say, "In every thing." Now, you should, of course, know best ; but, at present you are neither calm nor collected, and therefore it may be that you judge too rashly. There is, however, no doubt a melancholy change in the frame of your mind, and in your devotional habits ; but still, these are not *every thing* in religion : they are important and necessary things ; but they are not the whole of piety, nor yet the vital principle of it. Faith in Christ is the grand bond of union between the soul and God : and if that bond be not broken, your soul may soon return to its quiet rest ;—"cast down," indeed, "but not destroyed ; perplexed, but not in despair." But you say, "My faith is gone, as well as my hope ; they perished together, in the day of my calamity." Indeed ! how could that be ? Your calamity made a sad alteration in you ; but it did not *alter* the Saviour, nor the Gospel, nor the promi-

ses of God to believers. Perhaps it did not alter *your* leading views or convictions in regard to the person and work of Christ. If not, your faith is not clean gone yet. Examine the matter calmly : you were once fully persuaded of the truth, and suitableness, and value of the Gospel. Is this persuasion changed ? Is there any part of the Divine testimony concerning Christ, which you now disbelieve ? Do you think *less* of the Saviour than formerly ? He is not, of course, so precious in your estimation as he was, when you could look up to him as your *own* Saviour : but you still believe him to be the only Saviour. In regard to all but yourself, you are fully persuaded that he is able to save to the very uttermost. How then can you say, that your faith is utterly perished ? Is there no faith in a firm belief of all the truth concerning the Saviour ? If not, what do you *mean* by faith ?

Perhaps you never attached much importance to the cordial belief of the truth itself ; but have hitherto, regarded nothing as faith, but the *reliance* which you placed on Christ for your own salvation ; and therefore, as that reliance is shaken to its very centre at present, you, of course, conclude that you have no faith. Now it is certainly very useless to believe the truth concerning the Saviour, without trusting in him for salvation. It is, however, the belief of the truth concerning him, which is the *warrant* for trusting in Him. You may say, " I cannot trust—cannot rely, now : God seems to debar me, by visible tokens of his anger." Now, really, this is a rash interpretation of his dealings. You cannot lay your hand upon one text of Scripture, which says that such judgments as yours are fatal or final. The whole tenor of Scripture stamps them as being *fatherly* chastisements, inflicted in love, not in hatred. And as to the assertion, that you can no longer venture to rely on Christ for yourself, it is equally unfounded. You, of course believe and feel it to be true : but it is not the less false, in itself, on that account. The Spirit of God is just as able to enable you to trust in Christ now, as when he first won

your confidence to him ; and, for any thing that appears to the contrary, just as *willing* as ever. He is, however, the Spirit of truth, and therefore works by the truth ; and that truth which you require to see, in order to the renewal of your trust in Christ, is, that you are warranted and welcome to rely on Him for your own salvation, upon the single ground of still *believing* what God has testified concerning him. Now, that testimony you do believe with the heart still : unhinged and overwhelmed as your heart is ! You have lost your hold upon hope and peace, during this stormy and dark day : but you have not lost hold of the truth of the Gospel. Well, on this ground it is both your privilege and your duty to take up hope again. Now, if you see this clearly, the lesson is worth all that you have suffered in order to learn it.

Assuming, therefore, that you now see how your faith in Christ has secured your interest in Christ and maintained it throughout all the vicissitudes of your case, what do you think of your trials, when you view them in this light ? Your *soul* is still safe : God is still your friend ; the Saviour has not forgotten you ; the Spirit has not forsaken you—whatever you have lost or suffered. Is not this an *up-making* portion ? Does not all this balance the weight of affliction, and even lighten it ? You may now calculate upon grace to help, and on strength to sustain you. “Humble” yourself under the mighty hand of God, and he will exalt you in due season. This hot furnace was the fiery trial of your *faith*, as well as your patience ; and, accordingly, it has purified your faith from much of its dross, and increased its value in your own estimation. And, is it not amazing to you to see the glorious principle of salvation by faith, like a rainbow, spanning and spangling the dark clouds of your calamity ! Can you ever cease to wonder at this wonder ? *Saved by faith !* Now you can do and endure, as seeing Him who is INVISIBLE.

## No. XIII.

## EXPERIMENTAL MAXIMS.

“*HOLD the Mystery of Faith in a pure conscience.*” In nothing else can it be held with comfort or effect. When a bad conscience gets between the mind and the Gospel, it soon brings on an almost total eclipse upon both, until the gospel no longer appears what it really is, and the mind can no longer apply it as formerly. How naturally and inevitably this should be the effect of a bad conscience, you may judge from the fact—that you have found it *difficult* to get hold, and to keep hold, of the principle of salvation by faith, notwithstanding all your efforts to maintain a good conscience towards God and man. Your conscience was, perhaps, never more tender or watchful than during your inquiries into this principle; and if, in this state of mind, you have at one time been afraid to call your believing, faith; and at another time afraid to conclude that you were justified;—it is obvious that a bad conscience must render such conclusions impossible, upon scriptural or rational grounds. The sober and solemn fact is, that the comforts of the Gospel are in the hands of the Holy Spirit; and therefore, when they are not employed for holy purposes, he withholds them, or, what is worse, leaves the mind to the infatuation of crying, “Peace,” when there is no peace. However clearly, therefore, you may now see the way of your own salvation by faith, be sure of this—that as soon as you cease to strive to maintain a good conscience towards God and man, your hold upon the Gospel will begin to relax, and continue to lessen, until you sink into greater perplexity than ever. A good hope cannot be held in a bad conscience.

“*Let the peace of God reign in your hearts.*” Yes, let it! Some do not allow it to rule or rest in their hearts. “We have peace with God, when the Holy Spirit enables us to see and believe that we are justified by faith:” but this way of arriving at, and retaining, peace of conscience, is so

different from all our natural and from the *spirit* of many of our acquired, ideas, that we are prone to flinch from it, or to be afraid of it; and thus we unsettle that peace which springs from believing. We talk, indeed, of "living a life of faith;" but, in general, this is made to include almost every thing but faith itself. Nor is this the only way in which peace with God is disturbed and lost: it comes into the heart by believing; but it comes to 'rule' in the heart; and, therefore, if it be not allowed to sway its sceptre over our habits and tempers, it will not shed its sweet influences over our hopes. Oh, charge all that is within you, *to let it rule* over you!

"*Pray always with all prayer and supplication.*" If you know yourself to be a believer, you have not, of course, to pray for faith itself, but for the increase and the continuance of it; nor for justification itself, but for the habitual sense of it, and for the pardon of daily sins; nor for sonship itself, but for the spirit of adoption; nor for the new birth itself, but for the progress and perfection of regeneration; but what a field—what occasion—for frequent and fervent prayer is thus before you! And you will require to pray, until your spirit be disembodied for praise. Without prayer, you cannot maintain a good conscience: without prayer, you cannot keep before your mind the principles or the facts of the Gospel, which have relieved you: without prayer, the spirit of adoption will evaporate as morning dew: without prayer, the joints and sinews of your moral and religious character will relax and fail. You never can realize as your *Father*, the God you are reluctant to commune with. You may *call* him so before others; but you will be unable to *think* him so in your own mind.

"*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" Some, when they discover the perfect simplicity of the Gospel, and see clearly that the cordial belief of it is faith, and that faith itself settles the question of acceptance with God—have no patience with those who are groping their way to these great principles, and no respect for those who happen to state

them less clearly. Penitents are thus treated with harshness; and preachers, who are as intent as any on making Christ all and all in salvation, are branded as legalists and enemies of the Cross. Now, to say the least of such conduct, it is really *despicable*! How can such persons forget the slowness of their own hearts to apprehend and believe the whole of the Gospel? Guard against this censorious spirit! You did not see your own way or welcome at once, nor soon, nor easily. And it is more than probable, that one *half* of the patience, which you have required in your own case, will be quite sufficient to bring these humble inquirers into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For they are not *unbelievers*, because unable yet to see how faith itself unites the soul to Christ. In general, they believe with the heart all the truth with which God has connected the promise of salvation; so that, on your own principles, they are safe, without knowing that they are so. "*Strengthen,*" therefore, instead of staggering them.

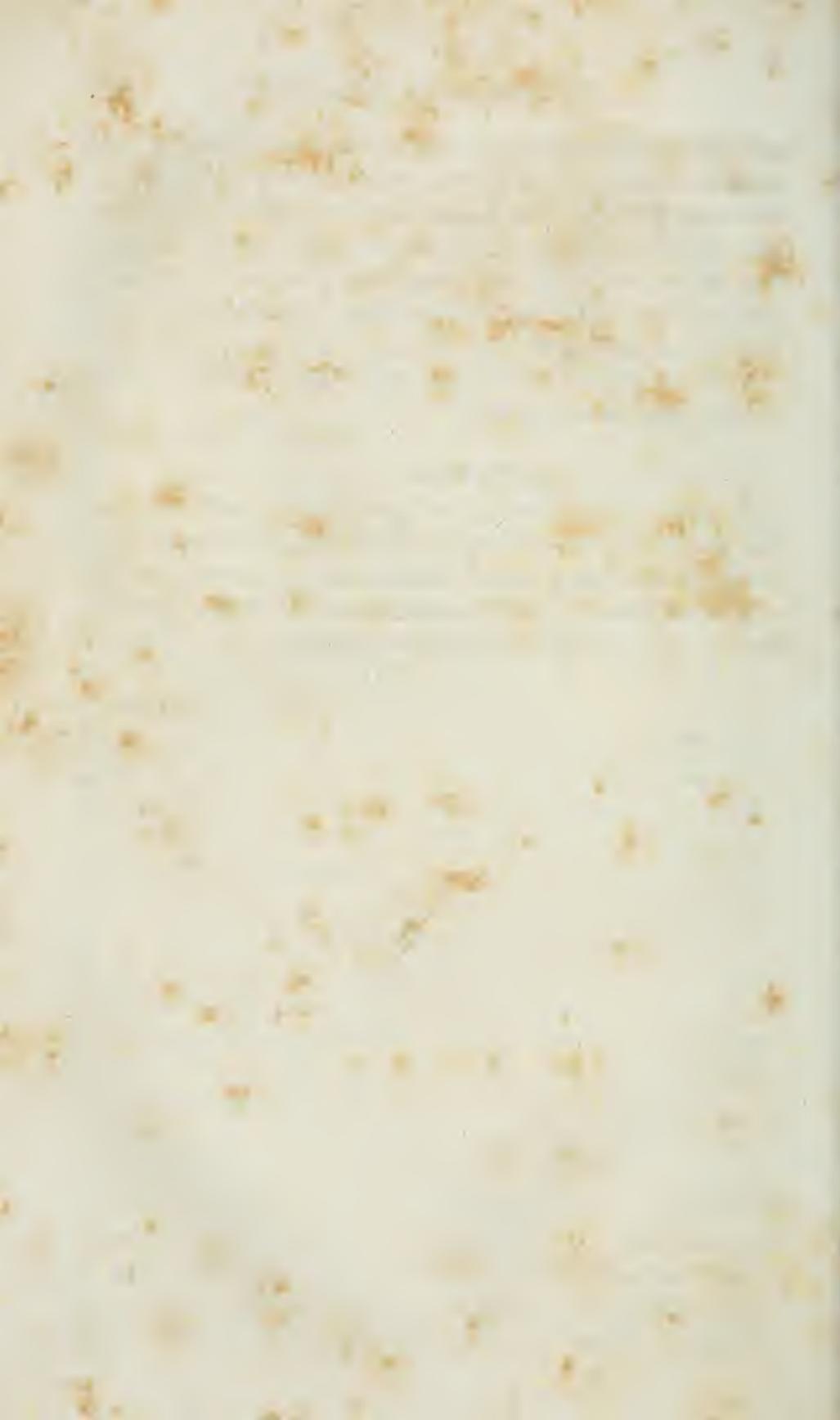
"*Be ye followers of God as dear children.*" Much, both of your personal comfort and relative usefulness, depends on acting upon this principle. The theoretic or logical conclusion that you are a child of God, because you believe in Christ, will not last long, if you cease to follow the Lord fully. It is, however, equally true that you will not long follow him fully, if you lose sight of this conclusion.—He who would follow as a child of God, must *believe* that he is a child of God. Now, if you believe this in your own case, do speak and act agreeably to your relationship. I do not mean, of course, that you should boast of, or obtrude on others, the hope of your sonship; but you may, you ought, to appear in your real character. By doing so habitually, you will feel more and more bound to cultivate the image and spirit of a child; and others, seeing not only your good works, but your good hopes also, will feel that religion *gives* the happiness it promises. Whereas when the careless, or the undecided, see nothing more than *practical* godliness in the pious, and hear nothing from them but details of fears,

and doubts, and strivings ; they are led to argue that religion, however good, is joyless ; and that the pious are as uncertain as themselves of salvation. And what else can they think, if you say nothing of your enjoyments ? Casting “pearls before swine” is wrong ; but, in general, wherever you can speak of your sense of duty with propriety, you may say something of your privileges and prospects too.

“ Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

## POSTSCRIPT.

IT may be both pleasing and useful to you to know, that this little work, now so widely circulated, has been blessed by God, in a degree which *ought* to be publicly acknowledged. The *history* of its usefulness would form a valuable record : but, of course, I dare not publish it.



# COMMUNION WITH GOD;

OR A

## GUIDE TO THE DEVOTIONAL.

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### No. I.

#### ACCESS TO GOD.

THE highest human honour is access to the King. Even a single interview with the monarch is generally coveted, and, if obtained, never forgotten. How much more should access to the "King Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible," be prized and improved! But, alas! it is not so in general.

We are naturally averse to "draw nigh unto God." The human mind, whilst unaffected by eternal things, regards prayer rather as an irksome task than as a glorious privilege. Accordingly we invent or avail ourselves of excuses for the neglect of prayer, and are not often very sorry when kept or called away from the throne of grace. Even when bowing before it in secret, and whilst no external objects distract or divert our minds, we are prone to hurry over devotion, and but too willing to return to the world. The social circle, or a favorite book, has, in general, greater charm for us, and can detain us much longer, than the mercy-seat of God. We find it easier to come down from the closet to the parlour, than to go up from the parlour to the closet. "The hour of prayer" is far less punctually kept than the hour of any secular or social engagement. The time which ought to be sacred to God is often sacrificed to the world; but we seldom sacrifice to God any of the time which belongs to the world. In a word, there is nothing we have more reason to be ashamed of than our low views, and our lower feelings, upon the subject of secret prayer.

And yet, prayer is access to God, and may be communion with God! It may be to us what praise is to angels and glorified spirits—"fellowship with God and the Lamb." We may come as near to the Eternal Mind in prayer, as they come to the eternal throne in praise. What then ought we to think of our *reluctance* to pray? Were any angel or spirit in heaven half as reluctant to sing the new song, or to lay his crown at the feet of the Lamb, we should condemn him at once, and expect his expulsion from heaven. We should no more think of excusing or palliating his conduct, than that of "the angels who kept not their first estate;" nor would his imprisonment in their chains of darkness, nor his impalement in their penal fires, surprise us. Thus promptly and justly do we judge, in the case of those who have "access" to God in heaven. We expect them to "*serve Him without weariness.*" Let not the im-

pression of this supposed case be defeated by the fact that the spirits in heaven have nothing else to do. The difference between their lot and our own is, indeed, immense. They have no cares, no corruptions, nor temptations to hinder or harass them ; but

“ What various hinderances *we* meet,  
In coming to the mercy-seat !”

True ; and just because they are many and great, the greater need we have for coming often and regularly, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help. For if glorified spirits could neither be happy nor safe without communion with God, how much less can we be happy without it in a world so trying, or safe in a world so ensnaring ! They need communion with God, in order to sustain their “ eternal weight of glory ;” how much more do we need it in order to sustain our patience under afflictions, and our character amidst temptations !

It will assist us still further, in forming a just judgment of our own hearts and habits, if we review some of the instances of special “ access” to God, which have been vouchsafed “ at sundry times, and in divers manners, to the fathers.” Under the Law, the high priest had access, annually, to the mercy-seat in the holy of holies ; and, when within the vail, God communed with him from between the cherubim. He could say with certainty, as he entered with blood and incense, “ *I will hear what God, the Lord, will speak ; for He will speak peace to his people.*” Now, with such an introduction as the typical blood of atonement, and such a welcome awaiting him, what should we have thought and said of the highpriest, if he had neglected to go into the holy of holies, or had not gone up to the mercy-seat, or had come out before he heard what God, the Lord, would speak ? Had any priest been guilty of this neglect, all hearts would have been shocked at his impiety, and all voices united in condemning him. We should have expected to hear that, like the offerers of “ strange fire,” he

was suddenly and signally consumed by penal fire. You feel this through all your soul, and are glad that there is no instance of a highpriest neglecting to draw nigh to God, when within the vail. But is it not more shocking and sinful not to draw nigh to God, now that the eternal throne is the mercy-seat, and the blood of the Lamb our introduction and plea? That precious "blood" is both the plea for, and the pledge of, our success in prayer. And access to God on the mercy-seat is now daily. At all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, we may "come boldly to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Why, then, is this freedom of access so little prized or improved? We cannot say that it is less interesting to enter our closets to commune with God, than it was to enter the holy of holies. The scene is, indeed, less impressive in its external circumstances, and it makes no appeal to our senses; but, when it is duly examined, it is really more useful than all the glories of the holy of holies. The ark of the covenant was, no doubt, splendid, and the golden mercy-seat sublime, and the cherubim majestic, and the cloud of glory, crowning the whole, effulgent; but the whole were only "shadows of good things to come;" whereas we have in our closets, the "good things" themselves. There we may behold the brightness of the Father's glory, in the face of Jesus; and see, in his person and work, the substance of all that was shadowed within the vail, and more than all that was typified throughout the temple. Our perfect and preserved BIBLE is, itself, more wonderful and glorious than "the cloud of glory." That Shechinah of the divine presence was, even when its radiance "filled the temple," a *dark* cloud, compared with the light which is imbodied in and shines from the sun of Scripture. Possessing this great and true light, we have no need to regret the loss of any thing which the ancient temple contained: for this light shows God to *be* all, and to be *doing* all, upon the throne of grace in heaven, that he was and did upon the mercy-seat on earth. If, indeed,

God had become less accessible, less sympathizing, or less faithful in reference to prayer, than he was in the temple, there would be reason to regret our transfer from the temple to the *closet*; but, as God himself is the same for ever—his heart the same in kindness—his hand the same in bounty and power—the changes of place and circumstances are of no consequence whatever. All the real value of the holy of holies and its magnificent mercy-seat was—that there God heard and answered prayer. But for that, and what they typified of Christ, they would have been mere gorgeous ornaments: and, as types are now useless, and the answer of prayer secured by the intercession of Christ, the “closet” is preferable to the temple, if communion with God be our object. For, in the “closet God is “ALL in ALL!” When we retire to it, we meet God only: we speak to God alone.

ALONE with God: How solemn and sublime! Such access to him has no parallel in heaven itself. It is as if all the spirits around the eternal throne were moved back to “the borders of Emmanuel’s land,” whenever a new spirit was about to enter; that thus its first interview might be with God alone, and its first emotions seen only by Him. Drawing nigh to God in the closet has all the *secrecy*, and none of the overwhelming solemnity, of such an interview.

The soul is there with God alone, as if it alone engaged all his notice. It has God wholly to itself; and may unbosom and plead as if He had no one else to attend unto at the moment.

We could not have entered within the vail of the temple, even if we had lived when the temple was in all its glory: but, if we could have entered to pray before the mercy-seat, what would it have been compared with thus meeting, in the “closet,” with nothing but God, and with God all to ourselves? Oh, why should we ever be reluctant to pray, or heartless in prayer? Secret prayer is a private interview with God, as real as that at the bush in Midian, or that on mount Peniel, vouchsafed to Moses and Jacob. If,

therefore, we would readily welcome such visits from God as the Patriarchs were favoured with, and would consider even one visit to be, on his part, an act of infinite condescension, what ought we to think of the daily privilege of visiting God in secret, and being noticed, heard, and remembered by Him, for good? Do consider; in the "closet" we are allowed to say all unto God that we could wish to say if we were praying upon the very spot where archangels adore and redeemed spirits sing. There is no note on the harp of Gabriel more welcome to Jehovah than the cry of a penitent for mercy, or the supplication of a child for grace. God makes it even a *condition* of coming to Him, that we "believe that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek Him." Think of all the armies of heaven rolling from their harps the anthems of eternity. Are they noticed and approved? Hear, then, the voice of God outspeaking the chorus of heaven! "Thus saith the High and Holy One, who inhabiteth eternity, unto that man will I look, and with that man will I dwell, who is of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word." Truly prayer is "access to God!" He dwells with the prayerful, as he inhabits eternity;—actually, willingly, and with delight. How willingly and cheerfully, therefore, ought we to enter into our closets, and pray to the Father who seeth in secret, and rewardeth openly! Oh, had Job known all this as clearly as we do, how would he have prized and improved such access and welcome to God! He would not have grudged the time, nor shrunk from the effort, required in drawing nigh unto God. When he exclaimed, "*O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to his seat!*" he would have gladly gone any where to find God. If "His seat" had been on the loftiest and coldest summit of Lebanon, and Lebanon quaking like Sinai, Job would have climbed it, to meet God in mercy. If "His seat" had been in the depths of the most desolate wilderness, or at the uttermost parts of the sea, Job would have travelled to it willingly, to "order his cause before God." We feel

sure of this ; it being so consistent with the patriarch's character. Indeed we should have readily blamed him, in the upbraiding spirit of his three friends, if he had been unwilling to go any where to find God. Well ; we know where to find God.

“ We have no such lengths to go ;”

no such question to ask. We know where he “ waiteth to be gracious.” God is always to be found at our OWN HOME, when we seek him with the whole heart. More intimate communion may be found with him in the closet at home, than was found in the ancient temple, even by those who travelled from Dan and Beersheba to appear before God in Zion. They could not enter into the holy place made with hands, but had to worship afar off ; “ *for the Law made nothing perfect ; but the bringing of a better hope did ; by the which we draw nigh unto God.*” Well, therefore, might Paul add, “ *Having, therefore, brethren, boldness (freedom) to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail ; and having a High Priest over the house of God ; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.*” Thus it is, that “ access” to God is the pledge of ACCEPTANCE with God. And, until this be understood and believed, neither the duty nor the privilege of secret prayer will have much influence upon our hearts or habits. So long as we have any doubt, or feel it but a “ peradventure,” whether we shall really “ obtain mercy, and find grace,” we shall not come often nor willingly to the throne of grace. While prayer is at all regarded as hopeless work, it will continue to be heartless work.

Now, many do doubt very much, whether they shall succeed in asking for salvation ; and they are very much confirmed in this habit of doubting, by observing some who have prayed much and long, but who are yet, by their own confession, quite uncertain as to their own acceptance with

God. Such persons are not exactly hopeless, nor do they insinuate any thing against the efficacy of prayer; but they have so little hope, and that little is so fluctuating, that the witnesses of it are not much encouraged to pray from their example. We have felt this, when we have found some man of prayer a man of fear. And as we do feel, and ought to feel, that God might justly refuse to answer our prayers for salvation; and as we see that He seems, in some instances, to refuse peace to better men, we are thus led into a suspicion of His willingness to save us. And this doubting habit is still farther confirmed, when our own experience in prayer is similar to that of the person just described. When we find that but little hope, and no certainty, follows our own prayers; and that we obtain no solid peace or enjoyment; and that the result is still as doubtful as ever; and that we know not what to think of our case: we are thus drawn farther and farther into the wards of Doubting Castle, away and from the throne of grace.

Now, under these circumstances, it is not by splendid descriptions of that "glorious high throne," nor by glowing pictures of the solemnity or sweetness of prayer, nor by strong assertions about angels not being more welcome, nor even by appeals to the success of others;—it is not by these things alone, nor chiefly, that we can be charmed back to the throne, or kept near it. These things have much weight, and a sweet influence upon the mind, whilst the mind can cherish the hope of eventual success; but, whilst that is doubted, they will not render us truly devotional. Indeed, we shall never pray much, nor with much pleasure, until we are persuaded that we shall not pray in vain. Access to God will be prized, just in proportion as we feel sure of acceptance with God.

"Is it, then," it will be said by some, "our *duty* to believe that we shall find the mercy we pray for? Are we warranted and bound to calculate upon acceptance with God, when we have sought it with all our heart and soul?"

What saith the Scriptures? For we ought to take no word, but the word of God, on this subject. Now the Scripture speaketh expressly on the point: "*He that cometh to God must believe that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" And again, "*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" Thus both the promise and the precept render it the duty of the prayerful to believe that "through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" they shall be saved. It is by overlooking this grand fact that so many of the prayerful are fearful. They watch, indeed, for answers to their prayers; but they look unto their own hearts for them, instead of looking also to the word of God. This is a grievous mistake. The state of our hearts should not, indeed, be overlooked; but, whilst this is true, it is equally true that our hearts cannot *feel* what we do not *believe*. If, after praying fervently for MERCY, we sit down to examine solemnly whether we feel any hope, peace, or joy, springing up in our hearts, we ought not to be surprised if we feel nothing of the kind, so long as our attention is confined to our hearts. The answer to such prayers is in God's *promises* to the prayerful; and, therefore, until they are noticed and believed, we cannot *feel* that our prayers are answered. It is what God has *written* that produces what should be *felt*; and it is by *believing* what he has promised that hope and peace arise in the mind. Now God has promised that "*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" If, therefore, we are conscious of having sought, in good earnest the salvation of God, by the blood of the Lamb, and for holy purposes, it is now as much our duty to believe that we shall be saved, as it was our duty to pray for it. Our salvation began, in fact, when we began to seek it with our whole heart; and it will go on, in holiness and happiness, just in proportion as we cultivate devotional habits. Indeed, a devotional spirit is itself one of the chief parts of personal salvation, and both the pledge and prelude of the whole.

It is when these things are understood by the prayerful, that the closet becomes, like the house of God, "the gate of heaven ; and that we obey the call to "enter" it, with something of the same spirit in which we wish to welcome the invitation of the Judge, when he shall say from the great white throne, "*Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.*" No one "on the right hand" will refuse or hesitate to enter the "kingdom" then ; and no one who believes that access to God is in order to acceptance with God, will refuse to enter the "closet" now. For the *prayerless* do not believe in the efficacy of prayer.

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## No. II.

### THE PROMISES OF GOD TO THE PRAYERFUL THE REAL ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

No complaint is more common, amongst one class of those who pray in good earnest for mercy and grace, than that they obtain no *answer* to their prayers. Their strong cries for pardon, although often uttered "with tears," are not followed by a *sense* of pardon. The groanings of their spirit for peace with God, although "unutterable," owing to their depth, are not followed by any calm of conscience. Even their entreaties for some ~~some~~ faint gleam of hope, lead, to little more than the suppression of absolute despair, and not always to that.

| In such cases, it is no wonder that complaints should be uttered, and dejection felt. "*Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.*" It does not, however, harden the heart. Accordingly, the complaints of the disappointed breathe no charge or insinuation against the faithfulness of God, and imply no reflection upon his character. The unsuccessful suppliants lay all the blame upon themselves ; and even

those of them who resolve their failure into sovereignty, do not impeach the justice of that sovereignty. They feel their own utter unworthiness, and see clearly that they have no personal or legal claim upon the mercy of God; and under this conviction, all their complaints are deep regrets, and never, in calm moments, murmurings or upbraidings. Whilst they exclaim, with David, "*O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent;*"—they add with him, "*But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel;—I am a worm, and no man.*" Thus they find, in the holiness of the divine character, and in the unholiness of their own character, overwhelming and silencing reasons for their want of success in prayer.

Now there is so much real humility in this state of mind, and it is so like the temper of David, and of other true penitents under the Old Covenant, that no minister of the New Covenant would hesitate to encourage such persons. He is not, however, an "*able*" minister of the New Covenant who merely assures them, "that delay is not denial," even if he add to that proverb the sacred oracle, "*Though the vision tarry, wait for it.*" There is, indeed, much truth, and encouragement too, both in the proverb and the oracle. In reference to many things, pertaining to life and godliness, they can hardly be too often remembered, nor too strictly applied, by the prayerful. They are not, however, very applicable, nor intended to apply, to the case of fervent prayer for a *personal interest* in great salvation. In the matter of hope or peace, there is happily, neither denial or delay on the part of God. "*He that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth;*" whether he knoweth or not the time. The vision itself does not "*tarry,*" however long and slow the prayerful are in discovering it. The message sent to Daniel, after his fervent prayers, is in effect, the assurance given to every one who is seriously seeking for mercy and grace, through the blood of the Lamb:—"*Fear not; for from the first day that thou didst*

set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard." In the case of Daniel, an angel, indeed, was the bearer of this assurance; and in our case no such messenger is vouchsafed. An apostle of the Lamb, however, assures us, upon the same authority, that "if we ask any thing according to His will, God heareth us." John calls this "*the confidence,*" which the prayerful have in God; and adds, "*If we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have (or shall have) the petitions we desired of him.*" 1 John v. 14, 15. This is, indeed, strong language, and must seem strange to those who have never duly considered it before. But it is not stronger than, nor at all different from, that employed by the Saviour, when he enforced and encouraged secret prayer. "Ask," said Christ, and it *shall* be given you; seek, and ye *shall* find; knock, and it *shall* be opened unto you." "*For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.*" Matt. vii. 7, 8. In all this we hear nothing, and see nothing, that sanctions or suggests the popular notion of *denial* or *delay*.

There are, indeed, instances both of denial and delay to be found in the Scriptures. Paul besought the Lord "thrice," that the thorn in the flesh might be removed from him; but his request was not complied with. It was not thus, however, that his fervent prayers at Damascus were treated. There, he was praying for his *soul*, and for *salvation*; and, at the end of three days, Ananias was sent to assure him that he had obtained mercy and found grace. Now this fact is characteristic of God's usual plan in answering prayer. When the blessings prayed for are temporal things, or those spiritual things which belong to the prosperity, rather than to the safety, of the soul, there is often, in the former case, denial; and in the latter, delay: but when the prayer is, like that of the publican, for *mercy*, the prayerful, like the publican, go down to their "house justified; for he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Matt. xviii. 14. Thus it is that denial, when it occurs in the case of the humble, regards temporal things only; and delay, when it occurs, is always owing to some defect of their humility. This is one general principle of God's plan of answering prayer. Another is, that, if we regard sin in our hearts, "the Lord will not hear us." Agreeably to this high and holy principle, James explained the unanswered prayers of the Jewish converts: "*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*" James iv. 3. Whoever, therefore, seeks mercy or grace for unholy, or not for holy, purposes, is sure to be denied. All grace is for gracious purposes; and all mercy to promote holiness. A third principle of God's plan of answering prayer is, that we "*must believe that He is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him.*" Hence, the express and authoritative injunction to every praying man, "*Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, (or, undoubtingly :) for he that wavereth (doubteth) is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*" James i. 6, 7. Thus, without faith in prayer, it is impossible to please God; and, therefore, useless to expect answers to it from God. For as he who does not believe that God "is," will not seek Him at all; so he who does not believe that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, will not find him at all. Unbelieving prayer will always be unprofitable prayer.

We have now before us the three chief principles which regulate the answers to prayer. By them, therefore, let us judge the real character of our own prayers. FIRST—Have we prayed humbly? This is a question which we can answer. We know the spirit in which we poured out strong cries and tears unto God for mercy. We remember distinctly how our souls longed and thirsted, and wrestled, for salvation. We can never forget how a sense of its greatness, and of our own unworthiness, pressed upon our hearts. We saw and felt that there was nothing between

us and perishing but the blood of the Lamb; that we had nothing to say for, but all against, ourselves; and that we could do nothing but cry for mercy. Peter, when sinking in the waves—the Publican, when smiting on his breast—and the dying thief, when exclaiming, “Lord, remember me!” were, at once, our examples and our encouragement, during those solemn moments of secret prayer. And though, on looking back to those penitential approaches to God, we feel that they are not so humble as they ought to have been, and remember that, at the time, we felt anxious to sink lower in self-abasement, and ashamed because our spirit was not more broken and contrite; still, when compared with our former state of mind, and when tried by the character of the natural mind, we cannot but think that, whatever else our prayers were then, they were truly humble: at least, we intended them to be, and tried to make them truly humble. We were not conscious, at the moment, of any pride, or self-dependance. We *meant* nothing of the kind, but were intent upon humbling ourselves before God, and upon repenting in dust and ashes. We were not, indeed, satisfied, at the time, with either our humility or our penitence; but wished both to be deeper. We were not, however, pretending, nor holding back our hearts from shame or sorrow. Accordingly, we feel now, that—whatever else was the defect of our prayers for mercy, and whatever be the result of them—we were not insincere nor heartless in them.

Well, this is the kind of prayer which God has promised to answer. And I thus endeavour to characterize it, and to compare it with prayers which have been answered, that we may see and feel that we have sought the Lord with our whole heart. It is of great importance to be sure of this: for, whilst we are not sure that we have prayed aright, we cannot believe aright the promises made to the prayerful. Settle it, therefore, in your minds, that as surely as you have mourned, and been in bitterness of soul before God, whilst looking upon the Saviour whom your sins have

pierced, so surely has "the spirit of grace and supplication" been poured out upon you from on high. Yes, you have been "taught" to pray, who have thus cried mightily unto God. And as you do not and cannot forget these prayers, neither will God forget or refuse to answer them.

SECONDLY,—Have we had a *holy design* in our prayers? It is of equal importance to be sure of this also. And, as in the former case, we can answer the question. We know whether we are in good earnest to be saved from sin, as well as from hell. We remember distinctly how we felt, and intended, and resolved, in regard to the sins which had dominion over us. There was, indeed, a struggle at the idea of giving them up, and many a fear lest they should regain the mastery. But we did not wish to keep them, nor to come under their bondage again. Our desire was, that God would not only forgive us sins, but also "cleanse us from all iniquity." We knew the fact, and were not dissatisfied with it, that if we regarded sin in our hearts the Lord would not hear us.

In a word, we did not wish to sin because grace abounds; but desired grace for gracious purposes. Thus our prayers were holy in their object, as well as humble in their spirit. Well; such prayers were never left unanswered. It never was, and never will be said in hell, by any one, that he prayed earnestly for holiness, but was denied it. And one reason why this blessing is never denied, is, that whenever it is asked with all the heart, the heart is influenced by the Spirit of God, who never awakens holy desires without intending to gratify them. Settle it, therefore, in your minds, that as surely as you have been led to plead earnestly for a holy salvation, you will be led by the same Spirit, to rejoice in that salvation eventually. This result cannot fail, because "*God cannot lie.*"

THIRDLY,—Have we asked in faith, nothing doubting? Now here we must, at once, plead guilty of much unbelief. We have often doubted, and always doubted, more or less, in all our prayers. We can hardly see, in our own case, the

possibility of keeping out all doubts from our minds in prayer. Indeed, the thing seems impossible, whatever be the consequence. The consequence is, however, that the doubting man shall receive nothing of the Lord; and, therefore, undoubting prayer cannot be an impossibility, whatever it may seem at first sight.

This matter must be minutely examined. Now, all doubts do not spring from *unbelief*; and many of them are not *wilful*. Accordingly, whilst we are prone to doubt, we take no pleasure in doubting. We should be very glad to be quite free from all doubts and misgivings of heart in prayer. Whatever sin, therefore, may be in them, we fall into it not willingly, but in order to avoid the far greater sin of *presumption*. So little idea or design have we of offending or dishonouring God, by our doubts, that we actually give way to them, lest we should offend him by hoping too much or too confidently. We think it more becoming and necessary, as sinners, to keep far off from the very appearance of presumption or self-complacency. In a word, we doubt, because we think it would be sinful or rash, in us, to believe that we have obtained the mercy which we have been praying for. Whatever evil, therefore, may be in cherishing the doubts which we indulge, it has certainly been in order to avoid a greater evil, that we have given way to them. This is the real fact of the case; and, therefore, it does not fall fully under the threatening: "*Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*"

When, however, prayer has been truly humble in its spirit, and holy in its object, it is sinful to entertain any doubt of its success, seeing God has promised, yea, sworn, to answer it. If, indeed, there were no promises, or the promises not "yea and amen" in Christ, doubting might be even a duty or a virtue; because, in that case, faith would have no clear warrant. But as He who has said, "Ask," has also said, "*ye shall receive,*" it is as much our duty to believe his promise, as to obey his precept.

In fact, whatever warrant or reason we have for praying,

we have them also for believing that our prayers will be answered. God never said to the seed of Jacob, nor to any one else, "Seek ye my face in vain;" for he is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent: His word standeth fast unto all generations.

"But," some will say, "whatever be argued or proved, as to the theory, the fact is, that my prayers for an interest in the salvation of God have not been answered yet. Years have elapsed since I was led to cry mightily unto God for mercy, but I have not obtained mercy. I do not set this fact against the truth of what I have just read; but I state it as an exception to the general rule." Now, upon the supposition that you have poured out your heart unto God for saving mercy, I here close with you at once, and ask—Upon what *authority* do you affirm that you have not found mercy of the Lord? Where has God *said* that he has refused your prayer? Who told you that you were an *exception* to the general rule? "I need no one to tell me," you will say: "my own *feelings* assure me of the fact. Should I not have peace and joy in my heart, if my prayers for pardon and acceptance had been answered? But I am a stranger to peace and joy, and almost to hope too; and, surely, that is authority and reason enough for saying that my prayers are not answered."

'This is, indeed, a strong case, and almost startling to one who has affirmed, and is pledged to confirm the fact, that pardon and acceptance are never denied, when they are earnestly sought for holy purposes. I repeat the fact, however, and proceed to redeem my pledge. Now, you say, that you *feel* that your prayers are not yet answered: accordingly, you *believe* also that they are not. But how would you feel if you believed that your prayers for mercy had been *presented* by the Saviour, and accepted by God? Do you not see, at a glance, that if you believed this to be true, you would *feel* both peace and joy? Well; do you not see, with equal clearness, that whilst you do not believe *this*, you cannot experience peace or joy? It is impossible

to feel the peace of believing, whilst you *disbelieve*. It is unreasonable to expect to feel the answer of prayer, whilst you think that it is unanswered. You cannot *feel* differently from what you *think*. Accordingly, whenever any one has felt his prayers answered, it must have been by believing that Christ had presented them, and that God had thus accepted them, for the sake of Christ.

“But,” you say, “I do not know that my prayers have been thus heard at the throne of grace. If I could think that the Saviour had interceded for me, I could then easily believe that I was accepted in the Beloved.” Well! Do you know any thing to the *contrary*? Can you *prove* that He, who never shut his ear to cry of a perishing sinner, has overlooked you? Would that be *like* the Saviour’s well-known and long-tried character, as a Mediator between God and man? Is it not far more in harmony with all you have read of Him, to believe that, when he saw you at the foot of the cross crying for mercy, he took up your cause? You know that he has taken up many such, since he took his place, as an Intercessor, before the throne; and he is not changed since you began to plead at the footstool.

“True,” you say; “but how can I *know* that he has interceded for me? You say, believe that your prayers are accepted through Him; but where is my *authority* or *warrant* for believing this? Would you have me to believe it to be true, merely because I *wish* it to be true? I may say here, (but in another spirit,) ‘*What sign showest thou, that we may believe?*’”

Now you are right in thus requiring a higher authority than my word, or your own wishes, before venturing to believe that you have obtained the mercy of God unto eternal life. Nothing short of a *divine* warrant ought to satisfy you; for nothing less can sanction a divine hope. But allow me to ask here, what do you mean by a divine warrant for believing that the mercy you implored is granted? What would you consider sufficient authority for the belief of this? Would the *written word* of God, in the Scriptures, satisfy

you? If so, I redeem my pledge at once: "*He that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth!*" Are you disappointed? Are you ready to say—"I have asked, but not received; sought, but not found." I am not sure of that. But, were it true that you had not yet found the mercy you had sought, it is equally true that you are warranted, by the express word of God, to believe that you *shall* find it eventually. "*Seek and ye shall find,*" is the assurance given in Scripture to all the prayerful. And how gloriously Paul amplifies and applies it: "*For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" Here, then, is a divine warrant for believing that your prayers for salvation *will be* answered; a fact which may well fill your heart with a hope full of immortality, and both increase and confirm your devotional habits.

But even this, pleasing as it is, is not all the truth. If you have prayed like the publican, you are "justified" like the publican. This is the scriptural fact; and it is by believing it, that peace comes into the mind. In this way only could the publican have known his own justification. No voice from the mercy-seat within the veil answered his prayer for mercy; no messenger from heaven assured him of pardon: if, therefore, he went down to his house with a sense of pardon and acceptance, it must have been derived from believing the often-revealed fact, that God delighteth in mercy, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

This subject cannot, however, be well pursued, until the affinity of fervent prayer and saving faith be clearly understood.

## No. III.

THE AFFINITY OF FERVENT PRAYER AND  
SAVING FAITH.

X
 WHATEVER we may think of prayer, and however doubtful we may feel as to its answer, we are quite sure that faith, when genuine, cannot fail to save the soul. "*He that believeth shall never perish.*" *He that believeth hath eternal life.*" Thus real faith places the safety of the soul beyond all risk and doubt. Accordingly, were we as sure that we had *believed* with the heart as that we have *prayed* with the heart—as sure that we are true believers as that we are praying persons, we should then feel that we were both warranted and welcome to consider ourselves the children of God, and to appropriate to ourselves all the great and precious promises. But we are not so sure that we have truly believed as that we have truly prayed. We have no doubt of the sincerity of our prayers for mercy and grace; but we have many doubts as to the genuineness of our faith. We know *when* we began to pray in good earnest; but we cannot tell when we began to believe in Christ with the heart, nor are we sure that our believing is faith. The consequence is, that whilst thus doubtful of the reality of our faith, we doubt whether our prayers are, or ever will be, answered.

I thus identify myself with you in your difficulties upon this subject, that I may gain your confidence, and prove to you that I have felt them—felt them also long and deeply—that I have as little inclination to speculate or theorize about faith, as to blaspheme. I have no new system to establish, nor any old ones to explode. What I have studied and prayed to ascertain for myself is—the exact *thing*—the precise *state of mind*, which both God and the Lamb call for, under the *name* of faith or believing; and with which they have graciously connected the promise of salvation. Now, in examining the word of God on this subject, I find,

FIRST, *That the Scriptures do not distinguish between ser-*

vent prayer and saving faith; but treat them as the same thing. Both the old and the New Testament distinguish, and that by the broadest lines of demarcation, between faith and *works*—between believing and *doing*; but never between believing and *praying*. Accordingly, there are no instances, in Scripture, of any prayerful person being represented or treated as an *unbeliever*, or without faith. The prayer of the hypocrite and the wicked is, of course, declared to be an “abomination to the Lord,” whilst they continue such: but when the wicked man forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turns unto the Lord with supplication, he is recognised and treated as a believer: “*God will have mercy upon him, and our God abundantly pardon:*” the very promise made to faith. Yea, whenever prayer is humble in its spirit, and holy in its object, it is regarded by God as faith, even if the suppliant be “trembling” at the word of God. Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. “A broken heart,” on account of sin, is never represented in Scripture as “an evil heart of unbelief;” nor a “contrite spirit,” even if only mourning, as without faith: but the promise to mourners in Zion is the very same that Christ made to his real disciples—“They shall be comforted.” Even those who are only hungering and thirsting after righteousness (and thus, in their own apprehension, “far from righteousness,” and, as some would say, “yet in unbelief,”) are not classed with unbelievers, but “blessed” by him who searcheth the heart, and assured by him that “they shall be filled.”

“*This is not the manner of man, O Lord God!*” Not the manner of those who make faith to consist in the belief of their own *election*: not the manner of those who make *assurance* the essence of faith: nor the manner of those who treat the timid and trembling as unbelievers. It is, however, the manner of him who is both the object and the judge of faith. He recognises and welcomes the first outgoings and yearnings of the heart towards him, as manifestations of a believing *disposition*, and as the first-fruits of the Spirit.

There is not, then, a moral distinction between prayer

and faith: they are not different things in their nature. Why then should you distinguish them, seeing the Scriptures do not? If you have prayed with the heart, you have believed with the heart.

SECONDLY. In farther examining the Scriptures on this subject, I find that they virtually *identify fervent prayer with saving faith*. Not only do they not distinguish between prayer and faith, but they represent them as the same thing in effect, and ascribe to them the same efficacy. Remember the case of the Syrophenician mother: when applying to Christ, on behalf of her daughter, she said nothing about the nature of her faith, nor of its genuineness, but kept on pleading for mercy. Her pleading was her faith. Accordingly, the Saviour called it so: "*O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*" It is true that, although she *said* nothing about her faith, she *showed* much faith, by persevering in prayer, notwithstanding many and great discouragements. And have not you done the same? If you had *no* real faith in Christ—*no* confidence in his blood—*no* high opinion of his gracious heart, would you, *could* you, have continued praying in his name? You may not have been accustomed to hear, and, therefore, not to think, that prayer is the best expression of faith in the Saviour; just as holiness is the best proof of faith in him. The fact, however, is self-evident the moment it is suggested. You now see, at a glance, that you would not pray at all in the name of Christ, if you had no faith at all in his name; that you would not plead his merits, nor appeal to his blood, if you had no faith in their efficacy; that you would not seek an interest in his salvation, if you did not believe him to be an all-sufficient Saviour. You do not pray to angels nor to the saints in heaven, as the Papist do. Why? Because you have no faith in them. And do you not see, that if you had no faith in Christ, you would not pray to him either, nor in his name? The thing is self-evident.

Consider, now, the case of the publican. There is nothing said of his faith, and he himself said nothing about it.

We see nothing in his case but humble prayer. But we are told that he was "justified:" and, as justification is only by faith alone, it is evident that Christ regarded the publican's prayers as faith. And it is obvious that he never would have prayed as he did for mercy, if he had not believed in the mercifulness of the God of Israel.

Remember also the case of the thief on the cross. His application to the Saviour was by prayer: "*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" Here, indeed, there was much faith expressed and implied; but still it was in the form of prayer, and not more than our prayers express and imply, when we make the blood of Christ all our plea for mercy and grace. And, as the praying malefactor was treated as a believing sinner, we are thus encouraged to pray, and warranted to regard humble prayer as cordial faith.

Remember also the case of Paul at Damascus. It was not said, Behold, he believeth; but, "*Behold, he prayeth;*"—evidently because praying is virtually the same as believing, or the best way of expressing faith. Accordingly, when he became an Apostle, and stood forth as the chief champion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he did not distinguish between prayer and faith; but designated as believers, "*all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ;*" and declared that "*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.*"

Thus it is that the Scriptures teach almost the identity of faith and prayer; and uniformly represent believers as prayerful, and the prayerful as believers. This Scriptural fact is of incalculable value, both to those who have been perplexed by the public controversies about faith, and to those who have been perplexed by their own fears and jealousies. Both classes are more numerous than many suppose. But what a pity, and how unnecessary, that the prayerful amongst them should waste their time or their spirits in doubting and discussing the genuineness of their faith! How much better that time would be employed, if

devoted to secret prayer. That would bring and keep before the mind, in light and loveliness, the grand *object* of faith—Christ crucified; and when he is before the mind, in the brightness of his glory, and the freeness of his grace; in the love of his heart, and the omnipotence of his hand; in the all-sufficiency of his sacrifice, and the authority of his example, unbelief is overpowered, and fear dispersed, like clouds before the sun.

What, now, do you think of your own case? Your chief difficulty has been, hitherto, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to the reality of your faith in Christ. Sometimes you have suspected that it was a mere *historical* faith. But does historical faith *pray* fervently? At other times, you have thought it no better than the faith of *devils*. But devils do not *pray*, whatever they may believe. You have also thought it *dead* faith. But does dead faith *pray* earnestly? You have often thought it the mere faith of education or custom—that vague and vapid kind of believing, which *any one* can practise, and which every one professes. But does this current faith lead into the *closet*, with strong cries and tears for mercy? I would not, for worlds, flatter you: but I must say, that if you are in the habit of praying with the heart in secret, and in the name of Christ, and for a holy salvation, your faith is “the faith of God’s elect.”

“But,” some one may say, “I find it quite as difficult to know if I pray aright, as if I believe aright. I am as much ashamed of my prayers as of my faith. Sometimes, I cannot pray at all; at other times, my prayers are hurried and heartless; and, at all times, they are so imperfect that I can hardly see how God can answer them.” This is a very common complaint, and a familiar acknowledgment. What, however, do you really mean to confess by this form of words? Do you mean to say that you only *pretend*, when you pray for mercy?—That you are *insincere*, when you ask for salvation?—That you feel no need of them, nor care whether you obtain them or not? Do you mean that in using the name of Christ, and referring to his blood,

you think nothing about them, or see no value in them? If, indeed, such be the character of your prayers, you may well say that you cannot see how God can answer them. He never did, and never will, answer hypocritical prayers.

But this is not what you mean. Well; do you mean to say that you were never in *earnest* about the salvation of your soul?—never *felt* what you said, when confessing your sins, and seeking an interest in the Saviour?—never wept, nor *wished* to weep tears of penitence before God? In a word, do you mean to say that you never felt any thing of the spirit of the publican, when he smote upon his breast, and cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner?” If so, why do you call your heartless words, prayers? But this is not what you mean. You are shocked at such an idea, and wonder how I could suspect you of such impiety. The fact is, I have no suspicion of the kind; but have had recourse to these questions, just that you may discover your own *sincerity*, amidst all the imperfections of your prayers. What you mean chiefly is, that though, at times, you have felt an humble and broken spirit, and could weep before God, and pour out all your heart; yet, more frequently you have been cold and formal. You mean, too, that you are sadly harassed by vain and wandering thoughts, even when you are upon your knees before God; and that often, when you even wish to enjoy communion with him, your heart will neither fix nor feel as you desire. But all this is your grief and shame. You are not *reconciled* to such praying. You do not like—you dislike, the bare idea of going on in this way. Nothing would please you more than getting over these hinderances. You are never so happy as when you unburden and unbosom all your soul before God, and throw all your heart into every word you utter. You can never *forget* the hallowed moments of retirement, when you first caught the spirit of prayer, and felt what it is to commune with God at the mercy-seat. You understand, at once, what MELANCTHON meant, when he said of LUTHER, “I have overheard him in secret prayer; and he spake as

if God had been in the closet with him." You can well believe this of Luther; for you have, at times, felt as if God was in your closet. Accordingly, what you want is, to get back to this devotional spirit, and to continue in it. No wonder! There is, however, quite as much that is pleasing to God, in the broken sighs and unutterable groanings of a contrite spirit, as in the ardours of sensible communion. A heart shrinking from and resisting vain thoughts, and struggling to throw off the world and the flesh, is, perhaps, as fully approved by him who searcheth the heart, as when,

" On eagle-pinions borne  
It climbs the mount of God."

What do you think, now, of the sentiment, that whosoever hath really prayed with the heart for a holy salvation hath actually believed with the heart? You are, perhaps, equally afraid to admit or deny it. It is, perhaps, somewhat *new* to you: and, if it be altogether new to you, you ought to suspend your judgment upon it, until you have examined it more fully. You cannot be too jealous of *novelties* in religion. It does not, however, follow, because a truth is new to you, that it is new in itself. The *spirituality* of the divine law is as old as the law itself; but it was treated as a novelty by the Jews, when Christ explained and enforced it upon the mount; because they had made void the law by the traditions of men. In this case it was the gloss of the elders that was the real novelty, and the doctrine of Christ was the old truth. In like manner, Popery, although ancient, in reference to time, is, in reference to Scripture, a real novelty; and the Protestant creed, the old faith of the Christian Church. It is not, therefore, the length of the time during which mystical views of faith have been current, that stamps them correct. Their long currency is itself a reason for suspecting their correctness, especially when the effect of them upon the truly serious and prayerful is discouraging. For that cannot be a right view of

faith, however old it may be, which makes salvation appear as difficult by the gospel as it is by the law, or as far off by faith as it is by works. There must be something awfully defective in every definition of faith which discourages or perplexes a soul intent upon obtaining an interest in Christ, and conformity to his image. The whole gospel is intended and calculated to meet the wishes of every such soul; and, therefore, if our views of faith only tantalize these wishes, or make that gospel to appear other than "good news" to us, those views must be erroneous in something; and to contend for them is to contend against the gospel itself.

This, I am fully aware, is not intended by those who teach, nor by those who hold, mystical views of faith. Nothing, I am persuaded, is further from their hearts, than to defeat or encumber the gospel. Their real design is to exalt and maintain that gospel, above the unholy level of slight and superficial views; and to secure a faith "full of good fruits." But still, if this system really prevent faith, and make the gospel appear as unmanageable as the law, no excellence of motive must be allowed to shield it from solemn reprehension. The express language of the Scriptures is, that faith is the hearty belief of the truth concerning the person and work of Christ; and that the best expression of believing with the heart, is, praying with the heart. This definition of faith is so simple that any one can understand it at once; and if it appear at all new to you, the novelty is not in itself, but in your notice of the fact; for the fact itself is as old as the Bible. In like manner, if, in reference to some old theological definitions of faith, it seems new, it merely *sounds* new; for in Scripture the prayerful are always treated as true believers.

But it will be said, "that the old definitions of faith are chiefly derived from the old divines; and that such remarks implicate them. Did not Owen and Baxter, Hervey and Henry, Watts and Doddridge, Boston and the *old* Erskines, understand faith?"

Understand faith! Yes, and possessed too, infinitely more of it than any writer who has arraigned them. They were "full of faith;" and it was their fulness which gave rise to that cast of mystery and indefiniteness which characterizes some of their explanations of faith. They were, in fact, so full of the *thing*, that they could not find a simple *name* for it. Words were the least part of their explanations of faith: their *spirit* was the living illustration of its meaning. There was no mist around the subject, whilst these thoughtful and devotional men were pouring all their soul into their sermons. Their hearers could then see that, however faith was defined, the real essence of it was a right state of mind towards the Saviour; and that prayer was the best expression of it. It is, therefore, only when men of "*little faith*" employ the complex names, by which the old Divines designated and described faith, that confusion is created. It is their words, when in the lips of men without their spirit, which "darken knowledge," and occasion perplexity. Accordingly, all the truly *devotional* men, who have clear views of faith, find no difficulty (but unspeakable delight) in the deep thoughts and holy unction of the old divines. Their adoring and realizing views of the Lamb slain, arrange themselves gloriously around definite expressions.

All their vague modes of expression on the subject of faith are forgotten, in the presence of their vast and radiant ideas of the great salvation. "The savour of the knowledge of Christ," is always full and fresh in their pages. In a word, they perplex none but those who have never studied the subject, and offend none but the fastidious and those who prefer names to things.

And yet, these great and good men have been treated in this age with unsparing contempt. The SANDEMANIAN school has recklessly consigned them, and their theology, too, to the very doom which the Saviour denounced on the Pharisees and the traditions of the Elders. Blind unbelievers, leading the blind, is the softest description given

of them. This outrage on truth and decency has hardly a parallel in the annals of polemics. It seems, indeed, impossible that any man, possessed of common sense or common honesty, could, for a moment, confound Owen and Baxter, Hervey, and the old Erskines, with *unbelievers*! It is like calling the stars dark, or the sun cold. Accordingly, all sober minds have no more tendency to suspect the faith of these worthies, than that of the Apostles, or that of "Abraham, the father of the faithful." And had their libellers, instead of calling them unbelievers, attempted to prove against them "an evil heart of unbelief," or to demonstrate that their sentiments amount to *unbelief*, even they must have seen and felt that failure was inevitable, and the enterprise as absurd as an attempt to prove that light was darkness.

It must be allowed, and may be regretted, that the old Divines do not always express themselves clearly upon the subject of faith.

As the *name* of what God and the Lamb call for, faith is often equivocal in their pages; but the *thing*—the state of mind required by the gospel, beams, yea, blazes, throughout their writings. Christ is "all in all" in their own religion, and their sole aim is to make him so in the religion of others. Accordingly, no man, seriously inquiring the way of salvation, ever rose from their works, under an impression that they were leading him *away* from the cross of Christ, to his own righteousness. Many have felt that some of the old writers lead inquirers in rather a *round-about* way to the cross: but they have felt at the same time, even when that route was most circuitous, that it was only to make their arrival more certain. The slowness is always for the sake of *sureness*, and never for self-righteous purposes.

No one owes these acknowledgments to the old Divines more than I do, and no one makes them with greater sincerity. I prefer infinitely, their *state of mind* towards the Saviour, to all the theories of faith extant. It was a living

lecture on the whole subject ; and the chief reason of its being misunderstood by some, and misrepresented by others, is, that they have not *spirituality* enough to enter into the spirit of these “men of God.” Their words, in unbaptized, and even in half-baptized, lips, must always lose more than half their meaning, and convey to others still less of it. They, in fact, defined faith, as a fond mother would define her *love* to her first-born ; not logically, nor literally, but with an abundance of words corresponding to the abundance of their feelings. “*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh,*”—is the real explanation of their system.

But whilst I thus heartily, though imperfectly, attempt to do justice to the memory and writings of the old Divines, I do not forget that their works are not the word of God. They themselves never intended that their definitions of faith should, in anywise, defeat or encumber the gospel. The most voluminous amongst the puritans would have burned or rewritten their folios, if they had suspected them of any such tendency. They had, however, no such tendency at the time ; they were written agreeably to the modes of speaking in use then. And, as our modes of expression are fewer and more definite, what is wanted is, not an exposure of their defects, but a full return to the language of Scripture. The word of God is able to make us wise unto salvation, if all the other books in the world were annihilated ; and it ought to be consulted and submitted to, without any reference to them as authorities. If, therefore, you have derived from any human writings, or from any human source, such an idea of faith as makes *believing aright* appear to you as difficult as *obeying perfectly*, you cannot abandon it too soon, whoever be the author of it. Whoever he was, he did not intend that his definition of faith should make faith seem an impossibility in your case. He drew it out, in the first instance, for *himself* ; and, therefore, you may be sure that it did not appear to him what it seems to you. He saw it in a light that

left his own way and welcome to the cross quite open, and under this impression, he gave it to the public, in hope that the definition would open their way. But if it *shut* you out, then all that you know of its author, (and the more that is good the better for my argument,) warrants and binds you to give up his definitions, and to throw yourself at once upon the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth.

But this digression is already too long. Let us return to the direct subject of the essay—the *oneness* of faith and prayer. Now you feel the necessity of faith. You are anxious to possess it. You have often tried to exercise faith in the Saviour. You have occasionally felt as if the emotions and desires of your heart towards him were ripening into real faith. But still you are not satisfied. You are far from sure whether you have, indeed, believed with the heart. If, however, you are sure that you have prayed with the heart, there is no occasion for all this uncertainty on the question of faith. For it is self-evident, that, if you had *no* faith in Christ, you would not offer up all your prayers in the name of Christ, nor make his merit your only plea at the mercy-seat.

It is, indeed, true that thousands unite, every Sabbath, in prayers which make the merits of Christ the sole plea; and yet evince no faith. But theirs is not a parallel case to yours. Mercy is the inmost desire of your heart, and the blood of Christ your only ground of hope. You can no longer be satisfied with repeating *words*, however good. You must now express *desires*; and, sometimes, they are so many and strong, that you cannot find words to express them. And such is your state of mind, in reference to your own salvation, that neither the number nor the nature of your prayers satisfy you. It is just what you see in Christ, and not what you see in them that keeps you praying. You feel that, but for what he is and has *done*, you must soon despair and perish. It is not your prayers, but his merits, which give you any hope.

Now such being the facts of your case, it is really un-

wise, if not criminal, to question the reality of your faith. Its weakness is very obvious; but its *sincerity* is self-evident. No unbeliever could pray in this spirit. There is no instance in Scripture of any unbeliever crying mightily unto God for mercy, through the blood of the Lamb. It is, indeed, difficult to say how far wicked men may go at times, in praying for mercy in the name of Christ. You have no doubt, known men who could pray with wonderful fervour, and with every appearance of sincerity, and who have been found out afterward to have been living in gross sin at the very time. Neither public, nor social prayer, however remarkable, is, therefore, any sure test of faith or sincerity. Secret prayer is the test. The men who can pray and drink—pray and lie—pray and defraud—pray and be profligate, do not, dare not, pray in their closets. Secret sin cannot be combined with secret prayer. The yet unmasked sensualist may at times, be forced by fear, to fall down alone before God, and break the silence of the night by the groans of remorse: but if he continue to sin he will soon discontinue secret prayer. His closet will be more intolerable to him than even the sanctuary, whilst he persists in sinning against light and conviction.

These solemn facts ought never to be forgotten; but except as tests of character, and warnings of danger, what have they to do with your case? You want to be saved from sin, as well as from the curse. You are willing and solicitous to be holy, as well as safe. Is it not because some vice still enslaves you, that you are afraid lest your prayers should not be answered, or that your faith may prove vain. Your fear arises chiefly from what you have been as a sinner, and from what you are as a penitent. The past alarms you by its guilt, and the present by its imperfections. It is not, however, *actual* nor *habitual* sinning now, that clouds your mind with doubts and fears. Your present difficulty (and it is a pressing one) is to see how prayers, so imperfect as yours, can be answered or accepted by God, especially as you are not sure that you pray in

faith. Here is your chief discouragement: not only all the "plagues" of your heart seem to forbid hope, but you suspect that it is still "an evil heart of unbelief; and knowing that without faith, it is impossible to please God, you are thus afraid at times to hope or pray. And yet you cannot give up either altogether. Well, you have no occasion to give up hoping or praying; for praying with the heart is believing with the heart.

This is, I am aware, merely bringing the matter to the same point again, without any additional proof of the truth of that point. More proof is, however, at hand. Now nothing can be conceived as more opposite or unlike to *unbelief* than humble prayer, in the name of Christ, for a holy salvation. Whatever difficulty you may find, therefore, in calling such prayer faith, it is certainly impossible to call it unbelief, without violating all propriety. UNBELIEF, even when in its softest form, is careless about salvation—indifferent to the Saviour—averse to prayer—heedless of holiness, and not afraid of the wrath to come. Unbelief is not ashamed of itself—nor much shocked at sin, except when sin is very gross indeed. Unbelief has no ardent longings after union with Christ or communion with God. Unbelief does not try to get hold of the promises, nor pray for their fulfilment. Unbelief does not weep at the foot of the cross, nor rejoice to go to the mercy-seat.

This is UNBELIEF. But this is not the state of your mind towards the salvation or the service of God and the Lamb. Almost the very *reverse* of this is the real state of your feelings and desires. Thank God, therefore, and take courage!

## No. IV.

## PRAYER, PROOF OF THE WORK, AND WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

WHOEVER has a praying spirit, has both the work and the witness of the Holy Spirit begun within him. All real suppliants are really partakers of the Spirit of grace and supplication. Were this well understood, and habitually remembered by the prayerful, it would both confirm their love to prayer, and settle that absorbing question—Am I born again of the Spirit? This solemn question has often made you solemn. It has occasionally agitated your whole soul. No wonder: for “*if any man,*” however moral or amiable, “*have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:*” “*Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.*” Ever since you read those solemn oracles, so as to mark and inwardly digest them, you have felt that saving piety is more than a mere good character, and that personal religion is more than the discharge of religious duties. These “true sayings of God,” have turned your attention in upon the state of your heart, as well as out upon the state of your morals. You feel now that you must “be born again,” if you would enter the kingdom of God. Your convictions on this point are gone so far beyond those of Nicodemus, that it is needless to say unto you, “Marvel not that ye must be born again.” You have ceased to “marvel” at the necessity of a change of heart, ever since you discovered the plagues of your own heart. Any marvelling you ever felt has given place to praying for a new heart, and a right spirit. To be the subject of the work and witness of the Holy Spirit is now your chief concern, and your daily prayer. And your chief fear is, lest that Spirit, whom you have grieved so often, and neglected so long, should refuse to take away the heart of stone, or to give you a heart of flesh. You even feel, at

times, as if he had refused to work upon your soul, and ceased to strive with you. And even when these strivings are renewed, you are afraid that they do not amount to *saving* operations of the Holy Spirit, because they do not produce such a change of heart as you desire to experience. And even when you are almost convinced that what you have experienced is the beginning of His work on your heart, how often are all your fond hopes overthrown again by the questions—"But where is the *witness* of the Spirit with my spirit? If I were, indeed, born of the Spirit, would he not witness within me, that I am a child of God?"

Such are some of your ponderings and perplexities upon this solemn subject. Sometimes you think that the Holy Spirit has given you up entirely; at other times, that what you feel is only his common, not his special influence; and, even when it is best with you, you are, as you imagine, such a stranger to the witness of the Spirit, that you can take but little comfort from what you feel of his work. Much of this fear is, however, really unnecessary; for it chiefly arises from misapprehending the work and witness of the Holy Spirit. A spirit of prayer is proof of the possession of something of both, in the case of all who are looking to Christ, and trying to be holy. Prayer, even if secret, proves nothing of the work or witness of the Spirit, in the case of those who are going on in open or secret sin. The sensual have not the Spirit. But where prayer is loved, and not belied by sensuality or dishonesty, it is itself the first-fruit of the Spirit, and positive evidence of his saving operations being begun in the heart.

Did this never occur to your mind in the course of all your ponderings on the subject? Who inclined your heart to pray? Who overcame the aversion and reluctance you once felt to pouring out your heart unto God in secret? "*Who opened thine eyes*" to see your need of an interest in Christ so clearly, that you can no longer refrain from praying to "be found in him?" Who brought you to feel that there is nothing between you and hell, but the blood of Christ?

Who awakened your present convictions and desires? Here is a change, and a change for the better, in the state of your mind: who produced it? If you are afraid to ascribe it to the Spirit of God, to what can you trace it? Satan would not teach you such lessons; and, certainly, the example of the world has not led you into your closet to cry for mercy and grace. Your trials in life may have had much to do with the change; but that fact, instead of disproving it to be a divine change, makes it more than probable that it is so; for nothing is more common, in the work of the Spirit, than to sanctify the trials of life to the good of the soul. In every view of the case, therefore, it is your duty to regard the change, from a prayerless to a prayerful spirit, as the effect of divine influence and operation. There is no other way of accounting for it satisfactorily and rationally. It is a "good gift" so far; and, therefore, it must have come "down from the Father of lights." You will be convinced of this, by observing how your views and feelings in prayer correspond with the scriptural accounts of the work of the Spirit. Paul says, "*The Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*" Thus he ascribes to the Holy Spirit's special intercession, a kind of prayer which we hardly regard as prayer at all. We are apt to think that we do not pray in the spirit, unless we enjoy great enlargement of heart, and freedom of utterance. Accordingly, the devotional hours which we recollect with most pleasure, and which we can never forget, are those which were marked with a holy calm—a sweet melancholy—and a free flow of tears, and tenderness, and suitable words. Then we felt that the Spirit was, indeed, helping our infirmities! And could we always, or even often, pray in that manner, we should almost feel warranted to believe that we had the seal of the Spirit upon our souls. But as it is not often that we enjoy such enlargement of heart, we hardly know, at times, what to think of our experience.

Now, it is not to divert your attention or your love from

this kind of prayer, that I remind you of another kind, which if less pleasing to you, is, perhaps, more pleasing to God, and certainly more decisive of the help and presence of the Spirit. "Groanings which cannot be uttered," prove, far more than any flow of words or feelings, that the heart is right with God, and that the Holy Spirit is working mightily in it. We may look back with shame upon those approaches to the mercy-seat, during which we could hardly utter a single word, but merely groaned in spirit: but the intercessor before the throne was not ashamed to present those desires to the Father, nor to say of them, "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." He saw in those unutterable groans and deep sighs, not the accidental workings of our own nature, but the workings of "a divine nature," struggling against the body of sin and death—the strivings of the spirit against the flesh. Yes, when you thought that you were not praying at all, while thus groaning under the burden of your sin and unworthiness, you were praying best. And were the Saviour to say to you, as to Nathaniel, "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee," he would undoubtedly refer chiefly to the times when you were so troubled in spirit that you could not speak. The prayers we have most cause to be ashamed of are those which we can go through without effort or feeling. We are not praying at all, whilst merely repeating words. Nothing is prayer but the desires of the heart; and they are never so fully or directly from the spirit of God, as when they are unutterable by words. Indeed, this is a state of mind quite *unnatural* to man. There is nothing in us, nor in human means, to produce it. It gets no help from any power or affection of our nature. Imagination will help the prayer of joy, and the prayer of faith, and the prayer of gratitude; but not the humble prayer of penitence. It is from the "intercession" of the Spirit.

Now you know, experimentally, something of this kind of prayer. There are times when a sense of your own unworthiness comes over your soul like a heavy and suffo-

cating cloud. You can hardly breathe under it. You feel as if your heart would break, it is so full and so heavy. It is only now and then that you are able to groan out the cry of Job, "Behold, I am vile." The prayer of the publican is not humble enough for your sinking spirit; you would go deeper in self-abasement if you knew how. You abhor yourself, and lay your face in the dust before God. You are terrified at despair, yet afraid to hope. You can hardly see how God *can* pity you. It seems to you almost presumption to pray for mercy; and when you do, it is by a groan or a sigh. These are solemn moments! The silence is so deep, and we are so alone with God, that we are afraid to speak. God, in his majesty, is before us; eternity, in its solemnity is before us; and were it not that we still see something of the CROSS amidst the overwhelming scene, we feel that life or reason must fail under it. You remember these moments; but you remember also that you did not think then that you were praying, far less that you were praying in the Spirit. You left your closet on those nights, ashamed and confounded that you could *not* pray. You felt yourself as far off from the mercy of God as you felt near to the majesty of God. One wish that often passed through your heart was, that the holy Spirit would help your infirmities, and enable you to pray. You had no idea that he was working in you mightily at the moment, and never more gracious to you. But, verily, God was with you then, as with Jacob on Bethel, although you "knew it not" at the time

Does this view of the matter surprise you at all? It ought not in the least: for, if you look back to those seasons of unutterable groanings, you will soon recollect that you never were more humble before God; never more self-condemned, or self-emptied, than when your spirit was so pained within you that you could not speak. It was then, especially, that you saw and felt that God would be *just* even if he condemned you; that you could say nothing *against* his law or his gospel, however their penal sanc-

tions might sink you ; that you had deserved all the curse, and none of the blessing of God. You felt through all your soul also, that you were entirely, and must be eternally, at the disposal of the divine *will* ; and that there was, indeed, nothing between you and perishing but the blood of Christ. You did not see at the time, how the atonement met all the difficulties in your case ; but you saw nothing else that met any of them. Every thing else, as a ground of hope, appeared to you a mere refuge of lies. The Lamb slain had all your attention ; and any hope you ventured to cherish sprung from his cross and character. You had not, indeed, much hope in him, and still less confidence, but you had none in any thing else. Now, what was all this, but the Spirit fulfilling in you the promise of Christ concerning his work : “ *He shall convince of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ?* ” The grand end of the Spirit’s office is, “ to glorify ” the Saviour ; and the Saviour is never more glorified than when the soul is brought to look away, and flee away, from every thing to him. This is the Spirit’s *foundation-work* in the soul, when he is about to dwell in the heart.

Remember also the influence which those solemn seasons had upon your character and habits. How thoughtful, watchful, and steady you became, under the solemn consciousness that your eternal all was in jeopardy ! How it tamed your levity, and broke down your pride, to find that you could not pray, nor, of yourself, think a good thought ! You were never so little nor so low in your own esteem, as when you rose from your knees, unable to pray but in broken sighs and burning tears. Your character was never better than whilst you had to leave your closet, day after day, saying to yourself,—“ Well, it must all rest on the will of God ; for I can do nothing but groan for mercy. If prayer could save me, I cannot pray. *Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.* ” You did not think lightly of sin then, nor expose yourself to temptation. You took no liberties with the Sabbath then, and had no relish for world-

ly pleasures. The Bible was not the least-read book on your table then, nor its pages hastily read. A prayer-meeting was not a tame nor tedious service then, but a sweet help under your own difficulties in praying. Your spirit and deportment improved, too, under your humbling sense of your own weakness and unworthiness. You were meeker, gentler, and less-easily offended than formerly. You were afraid of anger, and of peevishness, and of all jangling, lest they should make all that was bad in the closet, worse. You had neither time nor inclination to fret yourself about the trifles which vex those who care little about their souls. In a word, many of the best parts of your character, and of your habits in life, were actually formed whilst you were hanging between hope and despair, and groaning in spirit before the Lord.

I do not mean, of course, that your happier moments in prayer were less holy in their direct influence. Sweet communion with God in prayer is sure to have a sweet influence upon our temper and habits, because we have then something worth taking care of, and too valuable to be sacrificed for the sake of trifles. A man whose closet is really a Bethel, and whose heart is happy, in the consciousness of the divine presence, will do much and suffer much, rather than open the door of either to ill-humour, or useless pursuits. He knows, by experience, how easily the veil is drawn upon the mercy-seat, and how difficult it is to undraw it again; and, therefore, watches both his temper and his habits, that they may not get between him and the "face of the throne." Indeed, he can neither indulge ill habits nor ill humours whilst he maintains "fellowship with the Father, and with the Son." It is, therefore, no wonder that we refer to the help of the Holy Spirit those prayers chiefly which make us happiest, seeing they also make us holiest. Much, however, of their holy influence arises from the prior influence of "the groanings which cannot be uttered." They laid, or dug, the foundations of our religious character; and, but for these straits in prayer, we

should either have not prized enlargement, or not improved it fully.

I thus remind you of the humbling and sanctifying influence of our *speechless* prayers, (which we did not think prayers at the time,) that you may see clearly their divine origin. They are the intercession of the Spirit, excited and sustained by Him, as the teacher and helper of the church.

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No. V.

THE ACTUAL PRESENCE AND HELP OF THE  
SPIRIT IN PRAYER.

WERE we fully aware of the full meaning of our words, when we say that God is the Hearer of prayer, Christ the Intercessor for prayer, and the Holy Spirit the Helper in prayer, we could not pray without deep solemnity and real pleasure. The amazing fact that the sacred Trinity unite in equal attention to prayer, could not fail, if duly weighed and vividly realized, to awe and animate our souls, whenever we knelt at the mercy-seat. But, alas! though in one sense quite familiar with this sweet and sublime fact, it is not often that we pray under its sweet and solemn influence. Accordingly, it is almost a *new* fact to us, both when we see it vividly presented by others, and when we ourselves enter into the spirit of it. Then, like Job, we resolve all our past impressions of God into "the hearing of the ear," and exclaim, "*But now—mine eye seeth thee.*"

It is, indeed, humiliating to acknowledge that our realizing views of Father, Son, and Spirit, being equally interested in prayer, should be so few and far between. It is, however, only too true; and it is necessary to acknowledge it to ourselves fully, that we may set upon ascertaining its

causes and cure. Many of its causes are, indeed, easily ascertained. We sometimes hurry into the presence of God, and even hurry over the duty of prayer. Instead of pausing to compose our spirits, or to collect our scattered thoughts by reading a portion of the Scriptures, we often enter at once upon the duty. In like manner, we do not in general *expect* to enjoy communion with God, nor to find much pleasure in our closets. We are even in danger of taking for granted, that intimate communion with God is not often to be obtained. We have heard it spoken of as a special privilege; and thus we imagine that it must of course, be a rare thing. And when these misapprehensions and hurries are combined with any degree of a bad conscience towards God or man, it is no wonder that our realizing views of the divine presence are both few and feeble. For how could they be otherwise, whilst we expect little, and prepare less? Oh, it was not thus, it could not be thus, that the disciples entered their closets to pray, after the day of Pentecost! When they *knew* fully that the Spirit would help their infirmities, and that their ascended Lord would intercede for them, and that their heavenly Father would hear and answer prayer, they could not have knelt without awe, nor pleaded without hope. It was impossible, whilst these glorious facts were before them, in all their *freshness*, that they could be formal or heartless in devotion: for, next to the open vision of the throne of grace in heaven, it is the vivid belief of the truth concerning that throne;—it is, indeed, “*the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for.*”

If you have not fully realized this, or if you find it difficult to do so, there is, perhaps, nothing human could help you so much as a calm consideration of the case of the disciples, when they understood clearly the arrangements of heaven for hearing prayer. The disciples, although gradually introduced to an acquaintance with the nature of prayer, did not, like us, grow up familiar, from their youth, with all the facts of the subject. Some of the chief facts

flashed out upon them suddenly and unexpectedly. They never dreamt of such a thing as the intercession of Christ, or the help of the Spirit in prayer, until the facts were revealed to them on the day of Pentecost. All this, as we know it, was entirely *new* to them. They were not, indeed, utter strangers, before, to the office of the Father, Son, and Spirit, in relation to prayer. They were even well acquainted with the paternal character of God, and had heard much of the efficacy of the "Name" of Christ, in connexion with prayer. In like manner they were not entirely ignorant of the work of the Holy Spirit: but knew as much of the whole subject as made them very prayerful. Their knowledge, however, came far short of the amazing and magnificent fact—that the enthroned Saviour ever lived to intercede for them; and the eternal Spirit, to help their infirmities in prayer! This was almost completely new to them, and must have given almost a new aspect to prayer itself. Whatever they expected from the promises that Christ would remember them, and that the Spirit would help them, was far exceeded, and almost eclipsed, by the glory of that remembrance, and the grace of that help. They felt, if not said, when the promise was fulfilled, "*the half was not told us!*"

You perceive that this is a fair statement of their case, so far. Imagine, then, with what solemnity and delight the disciples retired, for the first time, to pray, with these facts, in all the freshness of their glory, vividly before them. If their closets had been the gate of heaven before, how much more widely that gate was opened then! Then they could see Jesus before the throne, presenting their prayers, embalmed with the incense of his actual intercession. Then they could calculate upon help from the Holy Spirit, not only in their public work, but also in their private warfare against sin and Satan. How they must have prayed the *first* night that all this was revealed to them! With what looks they must have met, with what emphasis said, to each other, when they knew it—Jesus ever liveth

to intercede for us! The Holy Spirit helpeth us to pray, as well as to preach!

I thus try to depict the whole scene that you may easily realize it, and feel how impossible it is to pray coldly, whilst the intercession of Christ, and the help of the Spirit are clearly before the mind. You see, you feel, that the disciples never could have prayed before as they did that night. You feel that, had you been one of them, you must, like them, have been amazed and melted by the discovery of these facts. Well, the facts themselves, are the same. Their value does not depend upon a *sudden* discovery of them. You have come to the knowledge of them gradually; but you do know them, and can set yourself to realize them. You have, whilst reading these imperfect hints, shaken off something of your cold familiarity with them, and felt that it is possible to shake off more of it. You have caught a glimpse of the right way of looking at the office of the Sun and Spirit, in the case of prayer. You are resolved to recollect this hint to-night, when you retire to kneel at the mercy-seat.

It may be, however, that the very clearness with which you now see the amazing fact, that the Holy Spirit does *help* in prayer, makes you doubt whether you have ever experienced his help in prayer. You may feel afraid to refer your own earnest supplications to a source so high. It seems too good news to be true, that the Eternal Spirit should have inclined our hearts to pray, and enabled us to pray according to the will of God! It is really more difficult to admit this to be true in our own case, than it was for "holy men of old" to believe their own inspiration. In speaking as the Spirit moved them, the movements of the Spirit were so sensible and extraordinary, that the prophets could not doubt the reality of their inspiration. But, in our case, the drawing and opening of the heart to pray, have been so gradual, and are so partial, that it seems presumption to ascribe such a slender effect to such a majestic cause. We know, and can never forget, how imperfect and impure our

best prayers have been. As acts of our own understanding and conscience we are ashamed of them; how then can we connect them with the operations of the Spirit of God? We feel our prayers to be unworthy of the natural powers of our own spirit: how much more of the divine power of the Holy Spirit!

The man who has never felt this deeply, has never thought deeply upon the subject. Oh, it is no easy matter to say, "with the understanding,"—the Eternal Spirit has helped my infirmities in prayer! It is easy to talk and argue about the influences, operations, and outpourings of the Spirit; but to say, as in the presence of God, I have *felt* them; and know experimentally that the Holy Spirit has welcomed and helped me to pray: he must think twice before he speaks once, who speaks thus. You feel this; and are, perhaps, becoming more afraid than ever to admit the amazing fact in your own case. You have been pleased and profited by secret devotion; and have thought at the time that surely the Spirit was helping your infirmities; but, now that the solemn grandeur of that help is breaking out upon you, you dare hardly believe that ever *you* have been really a partaker of it! Perhaps, some doubts of its reality, in any case, are forcing themselves upon your mind, and compelling you to ask—does the Holy Spirit help at all now in prayer?

Bringing the matter to this point may, indeed, agitate and unhinge you for a moment; but it will do you no real harm. It will do you real good, by drawing you off from taking things for granted, to the better plan of proving all things. I want to give truth the *force* of truth upon your mind, that you "may know what you say, and whereof you affirm," whenever you speak of the office or operations of the Holy Spirit. For, if you are really staggered by these views of the matter, it is certain that you have never examined the matter fully. If you think it at all doubtful, whether the Spirit still helps the infirmities of the prayerful, you have never looked steadfastly upon the facts of the

case. For what are the facts in regard to the continued help of the Spirit? Why, one of them is that the denial of it involves the virtual overthrow of the whole gospel. The work of the Spirit, and the truth of the Word, stand or fall together. The men who have denied or derided the doctrine of the Spirit's influences, might just as well have denied that God *hears* prayer, or that Christ *intercedes* for the prayerful. For there is nothing implied in all the work of the Holy Spirit that is less credible, or less rational, or less likely, than what is implied in the work of the Father and the Son. If the Father can hear, the Spirit can help: if the Son can intercede, the Spirit can assist. Why, then, if I am not visionary when I say, "God will hear me," should I be called so, or think myself so, when I say, "the Spirit will help me?" Even natural religion admits that the Father of our spirits has access to our spirits, and may influence them. Some Deists have even prayed to God for divine direction. Unless, therefore, I were to become an Atheist, or to deny that God can hear prayer, I cannot be visionary whilst believing that He who condescends to hear it, will condescend to help it. Thus triumphantly, you see, the help of the Spirit may be demonstrated. It is, indeed, wonderful that the Eternal Spirit should act upon our hearts, and draw out our desires after salvation and holiness: but not at all more wonderful than that the Father should listen to the expression of these desires, or that there is such a "great salvation" to pray for. It is just because the work of Christ is so valuable and glorious, that the work of the Spirit is so sure and constant. Thus there is no more reason to doubt whether the Spirit continues to help on earth, than whether the Father continues to hear, or the Son to intercede, in heaven.

But if these hints establish your faith in the fact that the Spirit does help the prayerful, they increase, perhaps, your fears in your own case. Now that you see that the help is as rational as it is necessary, you hesitate whether to ascribe to the work of the Holy Spirit the workings of

your own spirit in prayer. For although you have at times felt deeply, and wept sincerely, and cried fervently, and resolved solemnly, before the throne of grace, you now suspect that even all this hardly comes up to what is included in *divine help*. You imagine that if a "spirit of grace and supplication" had really been poured out upon you, you would have felt far more than all this. You can scarcely conceive how a day of such "small things" can be the fruit of so great a Spirit! This is a trying dilemma. Your mind is alive to the truth and glory of help from on high; but both the truth and glory of it make you afraid that you are not a partaker of it. You are unwilling to admit that you are an utter stranger to the influences of the Holy Spirit; and yet, you are unable to say with certainty, that you are a subject of them. You wish to be so—have sought to be so—and have occasionally hoped that you were so; but some of these hints have thrown you out of your usual track of thinking, and startled you so that you cannot yet recover yourself. It is, however, a good sign to be concerned about the work of the Spirit, and afraid of mistaking it; "*for they who are after the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit;*" whereas they who are after the flesh, mind only the things of the flesh. Upon this scriptural fact, I have often been glad to take my stand, when, like you, I have felt utterly unable or afraid to answer the solemn question, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit?" I durst not say yes; and to say no, was intolerable. I could only say, "Thou who knowest all things, knowest that I mind the things of the Spirit; that I am concerned and intent upon understanding them, and praying to be a partaker of them." Now, you can truly say this; and, therefore, do; cling to this, until you are enabled to say more.

Your great difficulty, now that you see the help of the Holy Spirit to be a reality, is, that nothing which you have experienced seems to come up to it. The Spirit is an Almighty Agent; and you cannot think that his work in the heart could be so weak as it is in your heart. I recollect

being sorely oppressed by this difficulty, whilst walking in the fields one day alone. It was in summer, when the insects were sporting in the sun. It occurred to me, whilst gazing upon them, that each of these tiny insects was as much the work of Omnipotence as the mightiest angel; that its almost inaudible hum could only have been called forth by the same Power which inspires the hymn of the archangel. I then saw in a moment that "small things," in the beginning of a work of grace, may be as really the work of the Spirit, as the gift of prophecy or miracles was so. It was a simple process of thought; but it was very useful to me. And it is strictly just; for as nothing but Omnipotence could have created an insect or an atom, as well as an orb or an angel, nothing but the Holy Spirit could turn the heart to seek its happiness in the holy salvation of God: for this is utterly unnatural and abhorrent to man, and therefore the effect of divine grace, wherever and however it is produced. Reflection, and especially afflictions, may, indeed, work a very considerable change of character, and drive men to pray earnestly for a time: but they do not sweetly *draw* to prayer nor really endear it long. There is a mighty difference between the kind of help which they, when alone, give in prayer, and that which the Holy Spirit gives. The prayers extorted by affliction are chiefly for deliverance from it, or support under it. When they regard, above all things, the *sanctified* use of it, there is a higher power than affliction operating on the mind. The Holy Spirit is helping mightily, when they regard a change of heart more than a change of condition—an interest in, and conformity to Christ, more than temporal deliverance. Oh, there is no better proof of "having the Spirit," than that we would rather suffer than sin; rather be the prisoners of Providence than the votaries of vice or the world!

All this might have been stated at once, and thus you would have escaped whatever agitation the former class of remarks occasioned. If, however, you are beginning to recover your composure, you will soon stand higher and firm-

er than ever you did, upon "the ministration of the Spirit." My object was to bring the question of "having the Spirit," to an issue; for whilst it is taken for granted, or left unsettled, it is impossible to "walk or pray in the Spirit." Many leave it in suspense from year to year, and are thus all their life long subject to the bondage of uncertainty. They cannot come to a conclusion upon their own state by a hasty glance; and they do not go fully into the question. They are afraid to decide, and unwilling to examine. They mean well, but they think little. They are sincere, but they are also superficial. The consequence is they seldom know what to think of their own case. Now, how much better, and in fact easier, it is to go thoroughly into the subject, until we ascertain whether or not we are partakers of the Spirit! One thorough examination of the question would save you from a thousand embarrassments in after-life.

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## No. VI.

### WALKING IN "THE LIGHT," ESSENTIAL TO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.

ENTIRE and eternal "fellowship" with God and the Lamb is the perfection of the bliss of heaven. The fellowship of the saints with all the "innumerable company of angels," must be delightful; and the fellowship of the saints with each other still more pleasing, because more natural: but the fellowship of both with God must exceed, infinitely, all the other social enjoyments of heaven. To see him as he is, to hear him speak, to speak with God face to face as a man doth with his friend, must be joy "full of glory." And then—this communion with God will be eternal and universal in heaven. All will enjoy it equally, both as to degree and duration. Oh, no wonder that all must be *holy*

in order to share such fellowship with God! An unholy spirit could not enjoy it even if admitted into it. What God shows and says of himself from the throne, to pure spirits, could only mortify and confound impure spirits. Every look of unveiled Godhead would wither their hearts, and every word sting their consciences, just in proportion as the looks were lovely and the words kind; because the unholy would feel through all their soul that these smiles and assurances were not meant for them. Thus heaven itself would be a hell to beings who loved sin and disliked holiness.

Now, as perfect holiness is essential to fellowship with God in heaven, so the love and pursuit of holiness are essential to fellowship with him on earth. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," said David, "the Lord will not hear me."—"If we say that we have fellowship with him," said John, "and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Walking with God, and walking in darkness, (that is, in secret or in open sin,) are utterly incompatible. They never were combined, and never can be. The appearance and pretence of devotional communion with God, may be combined with bad habits, so as to deceive the world, and the church too; but the *pretender* himself is no more deceived by his own dexterity than God is. He cannot lie to himself, however he may impose on others, or elude detection. The father of lies cannot lie to himself: much less can his most expert children dupe their own consciences completely or through life.

It is supposed, I am aware, that the self-deception of the heart is so very great that even a *sensualist* may flatter himself with the hope of salvation and bring himself to believe that sin cannot harm him. But, although some men have said so, and, no doubt, thought so in their own case, for a time, it remains yet to be proved that any man has *died* under this delusion, or even lived very long under it. Men of this stamp do not pass through life without checks. Reverses of some kind overtake them

sooner or later; and when 'the mighty hand of God' is upon them, its pressure soon undeceives themselves, even if they continue to deceive others. These remarks apply, of course, only to those who profess themselves to be the people of God, notwithstanding their vices. Men utterly ignorant of the doctrines of grace, or indifferent about religion, may both live and die flattering themselves with the hope of safety: but flaming professors, who are vicious, cannot carry their false security into the valley of the shadow of death. The first sweep of the swellings of Jordan wreck their peace.

Gross vice is not, however, the only "darkness" in which no fellowship with God can be obtained. Any allowed sin will interrupt it, and any evil habit prevent it. Fellowship with God is not understood where this is not believed and felt. If, indeed, fellowship with God meant no more than freedom or fervour in prayer, there might be something of this felt at times, even by very inconsistent professors; for they are overcome occasionally both by fear and hope, and thus drawn into something very like the spirit of real devotion. But, however they or others may call these meltings of the heart, communion with God, they are not so. Even the delight they feel in prayer at such times is not so. Even when the prayers of *such* men are both sincere and fervent, they are not fellowship with God.

There are many popular mistakes upon this subject, which require to be cleared up, for the sake of consistent, as well as of inconsistent, professors. The general opinion of both seems to be—that communion with God consists chiefly in *enjoyment* at the sacrament, and during secret prayer. And by enjoyment they mean sweet thoughts and tender feelings, arising from clear views of the love of God, and of the glory of the Saviour. When these things touch their heart, so as to melt them, they rejoice in having fellowship with God. But when they do not feel thus, they say that they have had no communion with him.

Now, in the case of a *consistent* follower of the Saviour, the first conclusion is quite true ; his delight at the sacrament and in the closet is real fellowship with God and the Lamb. But his second conclusion may be quite untrue. The want of such enjoyment is not necessarily the want of fellowship with God, or with the Saviour. It may even be a higher and holier degree of it than what we call enjoyment is. Oh, yes ! when the soul is sunk in the dust of humility and self-abasement, and filled to overflowing with grief, and shame, and hatred, and loathing of sin : and so absorbed in feeling the necessity and desirableness of holiness, that it can think of nothing else at the time—then there is more real fellowship with God and the Lamb, than when the soul can hardly contain its joys : for this deep hatred of sin, and this deep love of holiness, are more in harmony with the mind of God than any raptures are. For what is fellowship with God, but *fellow* principles and feelings to his own ?

Such being the sober facts of the case, it is self-evident that whatever an *inconsistent* professor enjoys at the sacrament, or in secret prayer, it is not fellowship with God and the Lamb. 'They hate sin. It is "the abominable thing" which their "soul hateth." Whoever, therefore, loves sin, so as to "walk" in it, is at open *variance* with God, instead of having fellowship with him ; and at variance with God on a point which God never will yield nor alter. He will bear with weaknesses, and overlook infirmities, and even forgive, in answer to prayer, the sins of those who hate sin, and are conscientiously trying to follow holiness ; but with the man who loves sin, and lives in it, God will hold no fellowship. "What fellowship hath Christ with Belial?" None. And it is equally true that Belial (a wicked man) hath none with Christ, whatever he may think or pretend."

These hints prove that there are serious mistakes prevail upon this subject. Inconsistent professors call that fellowship with God, which wants the very first and fundamental principle of all communion with him. 'That princi-

ple is—love to what God loves most—**HOLINESS**; and hatred to what God hates most—**SIN**. Where this principle is not in the heart, there is not, there cannot be, any fellowship with God. There may be fits of prayer without it, and flashes of enjoyment without it, and occasional meltings of heart without it; but no fellowship. It is essential, in order to that, that we have some measure of fellow feeling with God on the point where he feels most. Were this well understood, and habitually remembered, by those who combine a profession of religion with loved and allowed sin, they would soon become as much afraid of what they call their “sweet seasons” of enjoyment, as they are now of being *detected* in their secret sins. For, nothing is more ominous or alarming than a state of mind which can *set off* fits of devotion against habits of sensuality, intemperance, lying, or dishonesty. The man who can salve up the wounds of his conscience, under such habits, is really *searing* his conscience, with the hottest “iron” that Satan heats. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie.”

“*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have mutual fellowship with him.*” Walking in the light is both the rule and the condition of communion with God. It is itself practical fellowship with God, and leads to that devotional fellowship which consists in the sensible enjoyment of the divine presence.

But, it may be said, “walking in the light as God is in the light,” seems to be impossible: “God is light, and in him is *no darkness* at all!” how, then, can any one walk in the light as he is in the light? This objection is not so formidable as it appears at first sight. The apostle’s object is, not to demand perfection, but to establish a perfect rule of conduct. The angels cannot walk in the light, to all the extent which God is in the light; but they act upon his principles, copy his example, and cultivate his spirit. They adopt no lower, nor any other, standard of holiness. Now, although we cannot equal angels in walking in the light,

we can, like them, make God our example; and although we cannot come up to that example, we can avoid coming down to an inferior one. Perfection is, indeed, impossible in this world; but it is not impossible to make use of a perfect model or rule of conduct. Let us, therefore, consider how God is "in the light."

Now, in him, there is none of the darkness of *insincerity*. God never says one thing, and *means* another; never professes friendship, when he feels none; never employs fraud or flattery to gain his ends. All this, however, is common in the world; and, because it is common, God puts himself forward as the authoritative example of sincerity to all who desire fellowship with him. He will not allow us to make any man, nor any angel, the standard of our sincerity; but insists upon it, that we look to himself as our model. Now, this is not impossible. It is, in fact, the easiest of all the rules of speaking or acting, to set the Lord before us. The moment we realize to ourselves his sincerity, we see, at a glance, how he would speak and act; and thus see how we ought to conduct the business and intercourse of life. No man can be at a loss what to say, in any given case, if he is determined to be sincere as God is sincere. This rule would put an end to all shuffling, equivocating, and colouring, as well as to all lying and pretence. This virtue of *godlike* sincerity or integrity would also be its own reward, even if it had no connexion with the promise of the divine presence. Sterling and uniform uprightness, in word and deed, commands or wins the homage of all men; and, what is infinitely better, it secures, to a believer, joy and peace in believing. The God of truth marks his approbation of all who walk in the light of truth, by lifting upon them the light of his own countenance. He "manifests" himself to them, in a way that he "does not" to the insincere and the half-honest. The fact is, God regulates his fellowship with his professed friends, by the same general principle on which we regulate our own fellowship with our acquaintances. We avoid, as much as possible, all intimacy with the double-

mind, and the tricky, and the false-tongued. We make them feel, by our manner, that we cannot rely on them, nor act with them. They sit upon *thorns* whilst in our company. And whatever be their profession of religion, such persons find a similar reception from God, both at the sacrament and in the closet. There, too, they sit or kneel upon thorns.

Again ; in God there is none of the darkness of *pride*. He is majestic, but condescending also. All his dignity is as amiable as it is exalted. He is not a respecter of persons, nor ashamed to own the poorest sheep or lamb of the good shepherd's flock. He readily and equally holds fellowship with all his people of equal character, however unequal may be their rank in life, or their range of talent. Now, it is not impossible for believers to imitate God in his condescension and impartiality. We may walk in the light of humility, as he does in the light of condescension. It is necessary to do so, if we would obtain fellowship with God in our closets, or at the sacrament ; for He will not countenance any believer who is ashamed to own, as brethren, the poorest of the flock : but as sure as he declines fellowship with them, he loses fellowship with God. "The first" in rank in a church, is always "the last" in devotional enjoyment, whenever he is a consequential man. God keeps just as far off from him, as he himself keeps far off from his brethren. Such a man is as seldom upon the mount of communion, as he is seldom in the company of the church. His distance, and airs, and self-importance, are thus their own punishment. They may not, indeed, draw down upon himself the contempt of his brethren : they may bear his high hand, and brook his haughty spirit ; but God will do neither. The proud are an abomination to the Lord, and he beholdeth them afar off ; and, although he does not always punish them in their person or property, he invariably withdraws and withholds from them the sense of his gracious presence. None are so much neglected by God as those who neglect the people of God. There is no light in the countenance of God for the man

who darkens his own countenance when he looks upon "men of low estate" in the church. But, on the other hand, when pious men, of rank or wealth, are humble, affable, and impartial; and when they employ their influence to promote the welfare of the church, none are more honoured by God, either at the sacrament or in the closet. They are, emphatically, the men "whom the King delighteth to honour."

Again: in God there is none of the darkness of *imprudence*. He does not speak rashly, nor act without deliberation. He promises nothing but what he can perform, and engages in nothing which can involve his character in the least. And here, also, he is the example to them that fear him. We cannot indeed imitate the wisdom of God so as to become infallible in our judgment, and unerring in our management; but we can think before we speak; we can deliberate before we decide; we can stand aloof from hazardous and questionable undertakings; we can avoid giving pledges which we are not likely to redeem; we can keep clear of those habits which weaken the understanding and pervert the conscience. Oh, were all the professed followers of Christ doing all that they could do, in guiding themselves and their affairs "with discretion," how much more fellowship with God many of them might enjoy! But, if a man contract debts beyond his means of payment, or launch out in business upon mere credit without capital; or involve himself and his friends by rash speculation; or give in to the *sottish* system of transacting business at taverns; or so entangle himself with pledges as to be for ever at his "wit's end" for new shifts and excuses—that man cannot have communion with God, either in the sanctuary or the closet. His closet, indeed, will seldom see him. And if he continue to visit the sanctuary, and pretend to be *comforted* there, whilst persisting in this course, his case is ominous indeed! Comfort! There is no comfort in the gospel for the dishonest or the drunken, but the comfort that arises from the fact—that the blood of Christ

can cleanse from all sin, and grace teach them to "live soberly and honestly" in the world. Any comfort which does not stop crime is a curse. But, on the other hand, the man who brings both the gospel and the law to bear upon all his affairs, to regulate his expenditures, to form his promises, to moderate his desires, to bind his soul to the example of his Saviour—that man will not pray without comfort, nor communicate without enjoyment. Others may pretend, but he will "truly" say, my "fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Again: in God there is none of the darkness of *passion*. He is "slow to anger," and never angry without a just cause. It is not mistakes or trifles that he takes offence at. And even when He is justly angry, He does not abandon the offender at once. Thus God is "in the light;" and in all this He is our example. "Walking in the light as he is in the light," in this respect, is essential to fellowship with him; for the God of love will not countenance an angry man. Such is His aversion to all strife between brethren, that He commands the offender to leave the altar and his gift too, until he is reconciled to his brother. He even suspends forgiveness upon forgiving. But even if this were not the case, nor God to hide his countenance from the angry, anger itself would disable us from seeing the face of God. It is physically, as well as morally, impossible to pray in a passion.

Well might Jeremy Taylor say: "Prayer is the daughter of charity, and the sister of meekness; and he that prays to God in an angry spirit, is like him who retires into a battle to meditate, and sets up his closet in the out-quarters of an enemy, and chooses a frontier garrison to be wise in. Anger is a perfect alienation of the mind from prayer; and therefore is contrary to that attention which presents our prayers in a *right line* to Heaven. For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upward, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds. But the poor bird was beaten back by

the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant; descending more, at every breath of the tempest, than he could recover by the liberation and frequent weighing of his wings; till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over; and then—it made a prosperous flight, and it did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air, about his ministries here below.

“So is the prayer of a good man, when anger raises a tempest and overcomes him. Then his prayer was broken, and his thoughts were troubled, and his words went up towards a cloud; and his thoughts pulled them back again, and made them without intention. And the good man sighs for his infirmity; but must be content to lose the prayer; and he must recover it when his anger is removed, and his spirit is becalmed, and made even as the brow of Jesus, and smooth like the heart of God; and then it ascends to heaven upon the wings of the holy dove, and dwells with God, till it returns like the useful bee, laden with a blessing and the dew of heaven.”

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## No. VII.

### A DEVOTIONAL SPIRIT ESSENTIAL TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THE PROMISES.

NOTHING is more obvious than that eternal things are not seen in their true light, by the generality of mankind. Men could not act as they do, if they saw eternal realities in the light of revelation. Accordingly, whenever any great truth shines out upon them with unusual clearness, they change, or resolve to change, their line of conduct. They can neither act nor feel as usual, while that truth

is before them in its brightness and solemnity. It is master, whilst it can keep on the meridian of their minds. It is, therefore, self-evident, that if *all* the great truths of the gospel were vividly and habitually before their minds, a change of conduct and feeling would be the inevitable effect. No man could go on in sin or sloth, who saw, as in sunlight, the fatal and eternal consequences of neglecting the great salvation. No man could "halt between two opinions," who saw the two words, Heaven and Hell, as God has exhibited them in his own word. They are not seen in His "light," by any one who trifles with them. It is the light of custom—of convenience—of passion, that is upon eternal things, whenever they are unfelt or uninfluential. The indifference which some manifest, and the indecision which marks others, are therefore, the exact measure of their *spiritual* blindness. They may not be ignorant, but what they know they have not weighed nor searched out for themselves. Their knowledge has been forced upon them by circumstances, or picked up by accident and at second-hand. It is not the fruit of searching the Scriptures, nor of serious consideration, nor of secret prayer. They have just light enough to render their indifference and indecision highly criminal, and utterly inexcusable; but not light enough to terminate them, nor even to keep them from growing worse. For it is quite possible for an undecided man to become insensible, and for a heedless man to become reckless, whilst he only sees the truth of God in the light of the world. In that light it has little authority, and less glory. It has not the force of truth upon the heart or the character. Accordingly, whilst men content themselves with holding the truth in the vague and general forms in which it is afloat in the world, and merely fall in with public opinion, instead of forming their own opinions from the word of God, they may remain heedless and heartless, for any length of time. The word of itself must be used *as* the word of God, before it can prove the power of God unto salvation.

It is, therefore, no wonder that so many, who seem to know so much about the soul and eternity, should yet trifle with both. For what is there in their knowledge to prevent trifling? It relates, indeed, to grand and solemn truths; but not to these truths as they stand in the Bible, nor as they flow from the lips of Jehovah, but as they float, in public opinion. And when thus separated from God himself, and from his "lively oracles," they cannot make men wise unto salvation.

If these hints explain, in any measure, the carelessness and indecision of the multitude, they will also explain many of the relapses of the serious. Truth has not always the *force* of truth upon them. They revere it, and love it, and wish to remain under its influence. And at times it is sweeter to their taste than honey, or the honeycomb. But, somehow, they often lose their relish for it. Even their *knowledge*, as well as their enjoyment, of the glorious gospel, fades away insensibly from time to time. They lose both the sight and the sense of truths which have made their hearts sing for joy, even in the day of adversity.

Now, all this surprises as well as grieves them. They cannot always account for it. It seems so strange, as well as melancholy, that truths which had been often before the mind in light and loveliness, in power and glory, should ever disappear or become dim! If they had not been loved whilst they shone in beauty, or not improved whilst they captivated the heart, their eclipse would explain itself. But they have become dark and distant, even when we were not conscious of misimproving them. They have vanished away, even whilst we were fondly calculating that we could never again forget, or misunderstand them.

All this, however, is not so strange as it is lamentable. It arises, in many instances, from ceasing to "search the Scriptures" as we did, whilst we were absorbed with the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" When we can answer this question to our own satisfaction, we are prone to relax in our attention to the word of God. Having dis-

covered our way and welcome to the cross, we do not feel the same necessity for continuing our inquiries. And the whole matter seems so plain, and so pleasing, that we take for granted that we can never lose sight of it. Thus we come to put our clear views in the room of the Scriptures, and begin to draw upon them, instead of continuing to "draw water from the wells of salvation." The consequence is, that our clearest views of the gospel soon become indistinct. Hence the necessity of habitual attention to the word of God, however clear or copious our knowledge of it may be. We never can safely dispense with it, whatever be our experience or progress in the divine life. It must be "the light of our feet," until they stand on the sea of glass before the throne.

It is not, however, a formal use of the Scriptures that will maintain, in brightness and power, those views of divine truth which were acquired by a *devotional* use of the Scriptures. We are blending much fervent prayer with our frequent reading of them, when we first discovered the way of salvation for ourselves. We pondered and prayed over the word of God at the same time. Like David, we were upon our knees when we said, "*In thy light shall we see light.*" We both recognised and realized the presence of God with his own oracles; and with something of the solemnity, and much of the sincerity of the high-priest, when he went within the veil, we opened our Bibles, saying, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." In a word, our searching the Scriptures was truly a devotional exercise, when we obtained the view of the gospel which relieved our consciences, and calmed our spirits.

This experimental fact demands and deserves the utmost attention. Remember! You were not only thoughtful and watchful, but prayerful also, when the great salvation opened upon your mind, in its own native glory and simplicity. Whether the discovery was made by you in the sanctuary or in the closet, it was intimately connected with prayer. And however clearly it shone in the sanctuary, it shone still

clearer when you retired to pray over it. You saw and felt then, that this "marvellous light" was both the answer and the effect of prayer.

Such being the real facts of the case, it is self-evident that any decline of *prayerful* attention to the word of God must dim the clearness, and diminish the sweetness, of all those principles and promises which you first discovered, when in a truly devotional spirit. The decay of that spirit must darken them. They were first seen when you were living very "near" to God; and, therefore, all receding from that nearness must involve a proportionate losing sight of them. In a word, whatever we saw and enjoyed in the gospel, whilst we were very prayerful, can only be kept sight of, so as to be enjoyed, by continuing prayerful.

This general principle is of universal application. It applies particularly to the enjoyment of that "good hope through grace," JUSTIFICATION by faith alone. This is a truth which the *prayerless* cannot enjoy, however well they may understand it. Very few of them do understand it at all, or even notice it. As a *peculiarity* of the gospel, however, it is understood by some of the prayerless. They can argue about it, and prove it from Scripture, and point out the preachers and writers who garble or encumber the doctrine. Some of this class have neither mercy nor patience for any man who seems to see less clearly than themselves, that believing is faith, and that faith justifies the soul. They can demonstrate all this—to his confusion, and to his condemnation too! To hear them declaiming and denouncing thus, one would imagine that they *enjoyed* the doctrine, as much as they understood it. This, however, is not the case. Accordingly, the moment they are brought to the point by the pointed question—"Are you justified by your belief of the truth?"—they dare not say that they are. The consciousness of being prayerless, and averse to secret prayer, shuts their lips at once. They may continue to argue the general principle, and even go on to show that its truth is in nowise affected by their uncertainty; but beyond this

they cannot proceed. They see clearly that believers are justified by believing ; but they see as clearly, that it is not safe to reckon their own prayerless belief, faith.

Now, what the prayerless cannot enjoy, the serious dare not enjoy when they cease to be prayerful. The conclusion, " I believe on the Saviour, and therefore am justified for his sake," cannot be drawn so as to be satisfactory to the mind, when the heart is not right with God in the closet. It may, indeed, be drawn, as a logical syllogism ; but it will only have the effect of dry logic. It will not heal the wounds, nor hush the fears of the conscience, whilst conscience must confess to itself, that secret devotion is neglected or hurried over. Indeed, in such a state of mind, justification by faith alone will appear at times, a doubtful doctrine, or faith will be supposed to mean much more than the cordial belief of the gospel ; and thus the man to whom the whole matter was equally plain, pleasing, and valid, whilst he was devotional in his spirit and habits, may come to doubt and distrust the whole matter ; or at least to be unable to derive any comfort from it. For when the heart is estranged from God, or sunk into cold formality in prayer, salvation by faith will appear just as difficult as salvation by works.

These difficulties are, I am aware, felt at times by many of the prayerful. But in general those who feel them most have never clearly understood the doctrine of justification by faith, nor perceived that prayer is the best expression of faith. They have either heard a misty gospel, or misunderstood the preacher, and thus have always been at a loss on the subject. But their difficulties would be removed at once if the matter were fully explained to them ; because, to their devotional spirit, it would commend itself as the truth of God. Whereas, in the case of those who once understood and enjoyed the doctrine, but have lost the spirit of prayer, no explanation of it will remove their difficulties, unless, at the same time, it restore that spirit. The sober fact is, that the loss of a devotional spirits operates, in reference to the

gospel, just as the loss of a *mental* faculty does in reference to the affairs of life. Whilst the alienation lasts, the judgments of the mind are not sound nor consistent; things do not appear in their true light, or are not applied to their right purpose. In the same way, therefore, that a sane mind is essential for the wise management of human affairs, so is a devotional spirit to the enjoyment of divine truth. Indeed, a dislike of prayer is a species of moral insanity. He is not "in his right mind" towards God or towards himself, who has not begun to pray; nor is he who has ceased to pray fervently. Accordingly, the first thing which the Spirit of God does, both in converting a sinner, and restoring a backslider, is to bring them to their knees in secret, to seek God with all their heart.

The general principle of these hints is equally applicable to the enjoyment of the spirit of ADOPTION. The witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit, that we are the children of God, will not survive the death of prayer. The spirit of adoption is essentially and invariably devotional. It "*cries*—Abba, Father."

Accordingly when this filial cry ceases in the closet, the sense of sonship is soon gone from the heart. No wonder? For if it be often difficult, and sometimes almost impossible, even when we are most prayerful, to cherish the hope that we are the children of God, it must be felt to be sheer presumption to do so, when the heart is estranged from prayer.

I do not mean, of course, that sonship is disannulled or disproved by a decay of devotional feeling and habits: but I do **not** mean—that such a decay is, whilst it lasts, fatal to the conscious enjoyment of sonship. The *logic* of the doctrine will not keep up the hope of the fact. It is perfectly true that whoever is a believer, is fully warranted to consider himself a child of God: and it is equally true, that relapses in devotion do not prove a man to be an absolute unbeliever: but neither fact will meet our case whilst we are undevotional: because, in that state we are not believing with the heart. Faith is not dead when the spirit

of prayer is lost: but it is in such a *faint*, when it ceases to breathe prayer, that neither reason nor conscience dare venture to argue, from its bare existence, that we are "the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty." We may not, indeed, give up all hope of sonship, even when things are at this low ebb in our closet. The mind will look, and the heart will linger over the fact, that it is "by faith," sonship is obtained. And we may also cling to the weak vestiges of our former believing, as evidences of having "the root of the matter" within us still. And we may try to draw the conclusion, that all is safe although much be far wrong. But this will not do! It does not satisfy the heart, however it may blunt the stings of conscience. Our common sense frowns upon the paltry stratagem of proving our safety by a logical quibble, whilst the great body of our feelings are in a bad state! The sad difference between these desperate graspings at *indirect* means of comfort, and our former calm hold of the cross, whilst we were prayerful, alarms and shames us. We had then no temptation, because no occasion, to have recourse to a reckless logic, which tries to circumvent or evade God, by holding him to the *letter* of some promise, the spirit and design of which we disregard. Oh, nothing is so pitiable an expedient as this! It is contemptible and impious, when the heart is estranged from God, and averse to prayer, to clutch at, and cling to, some subterfuge which, like a flaw in an indictment, is a mere evasion. And yet this is, alas! the use which many make of some of the doctrines of grace. But how much better and easier is it to set the whole matter right, by a prompt and penitential return to the throne of grace! Half the thought usually spent in juggling the conscience would suffice to bring and bind it over to its old habits of watchfulness and prayer. And these *will* maintain the spirit of adoption wherever the doctrine of adoption is understood. The substance of that doctrine is, that whoever has welcomed the Saviour to his heart for holy purposes, is both warranted and welcome to reckon himself a child of God.

It is his *duty* as well as his privilege, to believe his own sonship. And the witness of the Holy Spirit with his spirit, that he is born of God, is, amongst other things, a witness to the truth of this *revealed* fact.

The general principle of these hints applies equally to the enjoyment of the doctrine of the FINAL PERSEVERANCE of believers. Now, that men concerned about the eternal salvation of their souls, should cling with a tenacious grasp to a doctrine which makes salvation sure, is only what might be expected. There is so much treachery in the heart, so many snares in the world, and such depths and wiles in the temptations of Satan, that I cannot, for my own part, understand the conduct of those who deny the doctrine of final perseverance. Many of them are too holy and too humble to think seriously that they can "endure to the end" by their own strength. They manifest in their prayers that they feel themselves dependant upon Him who "began the good work," for the on-carrying of it from day to day. And if they do, indeed, calculate, with any certainty, on being kept *by the day* from falling, they might just as well calculate by the year or for life: for they are only subdividing the promise in appearance, without subverting the principle in reality. But whether for the day, the year, or for life, the calculation, if made to any purpose, must be made in a devotional spirit. As in the former cases the dry logic of the doctrine will not maintain the hope of the promise. It cannot do so in any sober mind: for the promise is, that He who began the good work will carry it on:—of course, therefore, carry it on in its *goodness*. It is not, therefore, *that* work which is going on, when a devotional spirit is going off.

## No. VIII.

## DEVOTIONAL PREPARATION FOR THE SANCTUARY.

IF the house of God be, indeed, "*the gate of heaven*," it demands and deserves from us far more than regular, or even reverential, attendance. We ought to prepare for it, as well as to repair to it. We ought to be "in the Spirit," as well as in our place, on the Lord's day; for the house of God is the gate of heaven, only to the "spiritually minded." It is not such a gate of heaven as that which John saw in Patmos—so wide and so open that he had only to look, in order to behold the throne of God and the mansions of glory. It is rather such a gate as the types were to the Saviour before his coming, or as the prophecies are to futurity; solemn, but shadowy; direct, but dim: so that if our minds be not spiritual when we enter it, we shall see but little, and enjoy less, of the heaven to which it leads.

Accordingly, we have found, when we have come into the house of God altogether unprepared, that it was any thing but the gate of heaven to our souls. It has been the gate of sleep or the gate of weariness to us when we have entered it prayerless; and we have felt it to be almost the gate of hell when all its ordinances poured fire into our consciences, and fear into our hearts. And this they have done, when our utter want of relish for them has forced upon us the awful suspicion that we were surely *hardening* under the gospel.

These are melancholy and humiliating confessions. They ought, however, to be thus publicly made, that we may be shamed out of those habits which bring on such states of mind; and that we may see and feel the necessity of due preparation for the house of God. For it may be to us the gate of heaven if we come to it in a right spirit and with proper motives. Now we have much need that it should be so to us. For if the house of God do not fix

our minds on eternal things, no other house is likely to bring us under the powers of the world to come. The house of mourning, by its gloom and by its silence, renders us solemn and thoughtful whilst we are in it; but its deep influence is not lasting: it lessens every day after the funeral, and soon subsides entirely. And in the world, although there are events for ever occurring which ought to burn in upon our souls the conviction that "this is not our rest"—this, alas, is not the lesson we learn from them! This world, with all its cares and crosses, does not, by its own influence, throw our thoughts direct or often upon the world to come. Even when we ourselves are the sufferers, such is the tendency of our minds, that we are inclined to turn our trials into excuses for the neglect of the great salvation;—so that unless the house of God furnish an antidote to these plagues of our hearts, they are sure to ruin us. We are, therefore, deeply interested and obligated to form and maintain such devotional habits of preparation for the sanctuary, that its "waters" may be for us, from sabbath to sabbath, cleansing, healing, and refreshing. David felt the necessity of this, and never trusted his principles of love or relish for Zion to their own vitality or unaided influence; but prayed habitually, "*O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy Tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.*" It was thus that David found the house of God to be the gate of heaven to his soul.

Whenever the benefits of the sanctuary are thus strongly stated, and preparation for it thus solemnly enforced, you naturally, and not improperly, advert in your own minds to the character and preaching of the minister of that sanctuary which you attend. And you ought to "take heed" *who* you hear, and *what* you hear, as well as "how you hear." It is as much your duty to quit a minister who is not a man of God, and to shun a ministry which shuns to declare the whole counsel of God, as it is to attend the house of God. Your love to Zion is but lukewarm if you countenance a bad

man or false doctrine in Zion. Hearers have it, however, in their power to make both a good man and good preaching much better. For if both are worthy of esteem, even whilst his people are not very prayerful, or whilst only a few of them are so, what would his spirits or sermons be, were he sure that the great body of his charge came from their closets to the Sanctuary?

You have perhaps said, when you heard of the preaching of Whitfield, Romaine, and Spencer, why do not our ministers preach with their unction and energy? One reason is that far fewer pray for us than the number who prayed for them. Whitfield was borne up and borne through by the high and sweet consciousness, that underneath him were the wings of the secret and family prayers of thousands. He had Aarons and Hurs to hold up his hands upon every mount to Amalek; where he unfurled the standard of the cross. Under such circumstances he could not, and no good man could, be cold or tame in his preaching.

It may be said in answer to this, "that Whitfield, by his own devotional spirit and example, created the prayerfulness which thus inspired and sustained him." And to a great extent this is true. But "prayer was made for him," not only by his own converts, but by all who loved and longed for the conversion of souls. He knew this—and "watched for souls," as one who must give account.

Now something, yea much, of this, you may promote by a prayerful regard to your own profiting; for if you consult your own spiritual benefit, your minister is sure to be benefited. A praying people will make a preaching minister, as much by their prayers for *themselves* as by what they offer for him. And in this obvious way; while the consciousness that he has not forgotten at the mercy-seat, will sooth his spirit, that consciousness that you have been *alone* with God, and are come from communing with God and the Lamb, will rouse his spirit to meet your spirit, so as to mingle with it in all its holy aspirations. He will feel, through all his soul, that a devotional people cannot be edified by

an undevotional minister—that a sermon unbaptized by prayer will betray itself and him too, amongst the prayerful; and that no dexterity in speaking will mask heartlessness in thinking. Thus he will have, in your devotional character, a check upon his own; and his own, thus kept on the alert, will react upon yours, in a similar way.

Besides, if your errand to the house of God, be a *spiritual* one, you cannot expect to succeed without trying, at least, to be “in the spirit on the Lord’s day” before you go out. It should not depend upon the morning prayer, or the morning sermon, of the minister, whether you shall be in good or bad frame of mind during the Sabbath. They may, indeed, have occasionally broken up a bad frame of mind, and been, unexpectedly, the means of restoring your soul from its wanderings; but, whenever they have been instrumental in this way, you have been made to feel deeply, at the time, that such sovereign *lifts* were fraught with reproof, as well as with revival. You never were unexpectedly quickened in the Sanctuary, without being cut to the heart, by the consciousness that you might have been restored sooner, if you had not restrained prayer before God. Accordingly, your first resolution, when thus brought again to your “right mind” was, that you would not let things go wrong again between you and God, by coming prayerless or heartless to the house of God. I remind you of this fact that you may feel that you have no reason to expect to see his glory in the sanctuary, unless you have prayed at home, “*I beseech thee, show me thy glory.*” Whatever is worth *finding* in his house, is worth *seeking* in your own closet. It is, therefore, presumption, if not high insult, to expect the divine presence or blessing in Zion, if you neglect to pray for them before we come to Zion. If we would feed upon its “green pastures,” or be refreshed by its “still waters,” we must, like David, pray, “*O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me, let them guide me to thy holy hill.*”

It is much easier to enforce this rule than to endear it. It may, however, be commended, as well as commanded:

for your own comfort is inseparably connected with its observance. Now you know, by experience, that it is a wretched post to sit in the house of God listening to promises, which you cannot lay hold on for yourselves; looking at prospects of heaven, which you dare not realize; hearing of sweet feelings, which you have lost! Nothing is more painful than to see the wells of salvation overflowing with the waters of life, and feel averse or unable to drink. The fabled cup of Tantalus is nothing to this, when the soul feels, at the same time, its own value, and cannot forget the solemnities of eternity. Well, whatever there be in all this that is humiliating or painful, commends, as well as enforces, thoughtful and prayerful preparation for the sanctuary. For you do not, you cannot, wish to spend sabbath after sabbath, thus cold and comfortless. Only think of a *year* of such sabbaths! No communion with God—no witness of the spirit—no foretastes of heaven—no growth in grace—no peace of conscience—no holy liberty of soul in prayer or praise! Can you bear the idea of this? If not, what is to prevent the reality, if sloth or sleep be allowed to waste the sabbath morning? For, be assured, God will not humour our indolence by comforting us under it. The arm of the Lord will not “awake” to uphold or protect us, if we sleep, when we ought to be up and calling on it to awake for our help. We have found, by experience, that this is only too true.

Happily, however, this is not the whole of our experience. We have found too, at times, that the “glorious things” spoken of Zion are true. “*As we have heard, so we have seen, in the city of God.*” The house of God has been, indeed, the very gate of heaven to us. It was so when the great salvation first opened unto us in its greatness—when the glories of the cross first awoke our wonder—when we first saw our own way and welcome to the refuge set before us in the gospel—when we felt the first rising of a hope full of immortality, and, with adoring but speechless gratitude, wept out the weighty sentiment, “*why me—why me,*

*Lord!*" The Sabbath was not a weariness then, nor the ordinances of the sanctuary tedious. We felt as if we could have taken an eternity of these hallowed hours and emotions.

I appeal to you for the truth of this statement. I must do more;—Was your *business* or your *family* neglected or injured at all, whilst your soul was thus absorbed with the glories of salvation? Had your wife, your children, your tradesmen, your servants, reason to complain of your conduct or spirit, whilst you were thus happy in religion? O, no!—this good hope through grace exalted all that was good in your character and temper, and brought under strong restraints all that was bad in both. Yes; and whatever relapse there has been in either since, has risen, in no small degree, from the decay of that good hope. "For whosoever hath this hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as he is pure," whilst it is devotionally maintained.

It may be, however, that you suspect it to be impossible to maintain a settled hope of salvation. You may have found it decline and shake, even whilst your general character remained firm; and thus you have been led to think that, do what you would, you cannot keep it up. Now, on the supposition that there is much truth in all this, see what it proves, viz.:—that if the ordinances and the fellowship, the checks and charms of the house of God, *lose* their influence over you, you may be a lost man in the hour of trial and temptation! For if you have not hope enough to fortify you against them, you, of all men, need most to improve divine ordinances, that their sweet influence may aid your feeble hopes. It is, therefore, at your peril, during all the week, if you come to the sanctuary hurried or heartless. For unless you are awed or encouraged by eternal things on the Sabbath, and kept alive to the worth of your soul and the evil of sin, and kept under a deep sense of the divine presence and authority, and held up by the counsel and example of your brethren, you cannot "stand in the evil day." And as the bare idea of apostatizing, or falling, shocks you,

O risk not the dread reality by coming prayerless to the house of God. Thoughtful and prayerful preparation for the sanctuary is, however, not less necessary in the case of those who enjoy some *settled* hope of eternal life. A good hope through grace can only be well maintained by acquiring "more grace." This it wanted in order to keep before you the *grounds* of hope, in their strength and glory. Any one can talk of Christ being the sole and sure foundation of all warrantable hope. Any one can argue that the love and mercy of the divine character warrant much hope. But—to see this clearly, to feel it powerfully, to realize it for ourselves, so vividly as to enjoy it, is not an easy attainment, nor, when attained, easily kept up. In fact, these realizing views of the glorious gospel fade and vanish away, whenever the spirit of devotion is allowed to decline. And they *are* both dim and indistinct on all the Sabbath mornings when you have no heart for secret prayer. Their distance from you is always the measure of your distance from God. Your hopes are just as firm as the cherubim upon the mercy-seat, in proportion as you act as a priest before it. Or, if they do stand, after the spirit of prayer is fallen, they stand, only as the cherubim when the glory departed—cold and naked. Thus it is, that the want of a good conscience towards God or man, overthrows or overcasts a good hope through grace. And no sermon which does not set the *conscience* right, can set up, or clear up, that hope again. Accordingly, you have found, when you have come prayerless to the sanctuary, or without such praying as will bear to be *thought* of, the best sermons have failed to comfort you. You durst not take comfort from them, owing to the cutting recollection, that your heart was far from God, or not right with God at home. Whereas, when you have prayed so that your sincerity and solicitude were beyond a doubt; so that you could appeal to the Searcher of hearts as the witness of your spiritual desires; and so that it was not *unlikely* that he would meet with you, and manifest himself to your soul in his house—you have then found that

you could "take the cup of salvation," and drink abundantly, without fear or overwhelming shame.

Oh, why should it not be always thus with you? It might be so. God is not unwilling that you should be "joyful in the house of prayer." He has not made it a *difficult* thing to rejoice before him in Zion. There is provision enough, in the unsearchable riches of Christ to make his people "shout aloud for joy." And all that is wanting in order to bring or keep their harps from the "willows," is *holding faith and a good conscience*, by frequent and fervent prayer for the work and witness of the Spirit.

Happiness in the sanctuary is not, however, the only thing which we need. As parents, we need grace to help us to train up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And we feel that, if we were to forsake the house of God, we not only could not expect him to bless our families, but that our example might ruin them. So far we judge aright. But we ought also to be intent upon deriving such benefit from divine ordinances, that our parental character may improve every Sabbath in worth and weight. We ought never to visit the house of God, without looking at our children in the light both of time and eternity, and praying that the means of grace may revive and increase our love to their souls. We, in fact, forget one grand part of our errand to the gates of Zion, if we do not seek expressly and importunately to be fitted for the duties of *home*, as well as of public life. Every Sabbath ought to make us, and might make us, better fathers and mothers. For it is not necessary, in order to be so, that parental duties should be often brought before us. Any subject, and every subject, which brings eternal things to bear upon our hearts and consciences, will improve and confirm our parental character.

Whatever truth there is in these views of the nature and necessity of devout preparation for public worship, is of supreme importance to all who have much to do or suffer in the world. If your Sabbaths are not made the most of,

by being well prepared for and well spent, it must go very ill with your souls during the week. The bustle and cares of life, as you well know, have a desolating and hardening influence upon the heart. They sometimes almost upset the form of godliness, as well as deaden the power of it; and thus throw the mind into a state of such hurry, and confusion, and restlessness, and impatience, that it can hardly detach itself from its business and embarrassments. These even follow you to the house of God, and force themselves into your closet, and up to the sacramental table, at times. Now, if this haunting and harassing influence of the world should go farther, and get a firmer hold upon you, it may end fatally. It has placed you already upon what you feel to be the brink of a precipice which makes you almost totter. The same influence, when given way to, has drowned many in perdition, or pierced them through with many sorrows. Now if you would stand, you must "take heed lest you fall." But it is not taking sufficient "heed," merely to maintain your attendance upon the sanctuary. That is, indeed essential to your safety; for God will forsake the man who forsakes his word and worship. That man will sink as surely as if he were to quit a ship in the midst of the ocean. More, however, is requisite than not "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" with them who love Zion. You must strive to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," if you would pass unspotted or safely through the world during the week. For, if you find it to be hard work to "possess your soul in patience," or to maintain the power of godliness, amidst the pressure of your engagements, even in those weeks which are ushered in by refreshing Sabbaths and enjoyed sacraments, it must be impossible to do so when Sabbaths and sacraments are not "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

Men of business! suffer the word of exhortation. You know that the influence of the world is baneful. But, do acquaint yourselves fully with the Saviour's opinion of it. Christ never spoke of the world to his disciples, but with

the most tremendous emphasis. There is nothing in all that he said of danger from Satan, more solemn than what he said of the evil of the world. The prayer he offered on Peter's behalf, when Satan desired to sift him as wheat, has not been left on record; whereas the prayer against the evil influence of the world is recorded at full length. No prayer of Christ is so long, or more fervent. He repeats the petition again and again, that his disciples may be kept from "the evil."

This is not by accident. John, who heard and recorded this prayer, evidently regarded the fact as full of special design. And that he remembered it through life, is certain from the frequency and force of his protest against the love of the world. His epistles are a solemn commentary on the Saviour's intercessory prayer. And, in the same spirit, Paul's chief practical reason for glorying only in the cross of Christ is assigned thus: "*by which I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me.*"

Now, you are emphatically "in the world," and can only be effectually "kept from the evil of it," by making your Sabbaths a cloud of glory, which shall encircle and enshrine the whole week with the light and warmth of devotion.

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## No. IX.

### THE INFLUENCE OF PRAYER UPON PEACE OF MIND UNDER THE TRIALS OF LIFE.

WHAT an idea Paul must have had of prayer, as an antidote to the cares of life and godliness, when he said to the Philippians, "Be careful for nothing: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts

and minds through Christ Jesus!" This way of disposing of our cares and anxieties is so little understood, or so much disliked, that we are inclined to doubt its efficacy in our own case; or to ask—how is it possible, in a world like this, to "*be careful for nothing?*" Our temporal cares are, as we think, our chief hinderances in prayer. We ever turn them, at times, into excuses for the neglect of prayer; and imagine, when our cares are many and pressing, that much prayer cannot be expected from us. For, whatever influence the calamities of life may have in sending us often to our knees, the *cares* of life have a direct tendency to set aside, or shorten secret prayer. Indeed, at first sight, our ordinary cares do not seem, to us, to be things which prayer can remedy; but things which only time and toil can remove. Accordingly, when our temporal affairs go wrong, or our prospects darken, without exactly overwhelming us, we naturally devote to them, not a larger measure of secret prayer, but a larger portion of time and thought, it is *thinking*, not praying, that seems called for, under embarrassment and anxiety. Under heavy calamity, whether personal or domestic, we see, at once, that prayer is our only resource, because God alone can deliver us; but when we are merely vexed or plagued, we feel as if deliverance depended more upon our own good management, or upon the conduct of others, than upon the providence of God. Thus we are tempted to lessen prayer, and to increase effort, under an idea that great effort is the only remedy.

And, certainly, without effort, prayer will not prove a remedy for misfortune, or embarrassment. He who does nothing but pray, when the times are bad, or his affairs trying, will not surmount his difficulties. Prayer will not pay debts nor maintain credit, nor meet the emergencies of business. A man praying, when he ought to be *working*, is brother in impiety to the man who is working when he ought to be praying. This concession cannot be too frankly made, nor too forcibly stated, by the ministers of the gospel. It is not, however, in this way that the truly serious are in

most danger of erring. When any thing of this kind occurs, it is always in the case of men who never were consistent professors of religion ; but doubtful characters from the first. Our error, in seasons of trial, is not in praying too much, but in praying too little, or less than usual. And this is a dangerous error, whatever be the cause or character of our trials. For its direct tendency is to turn "the mighty hand of God" against us, and to make all that is bad in our lot worse. Nothing, therefore, can be more unwise than a process which must grieve the Holy Spirit, and make God our enemy. Now this will be the effect of ceasing to pray, when the troubles of life are pressing. God both permits and sends these troubles for the express purpose of bringing us nearer to himself, and for increasing the spirit and habit of prayer ; and, therefore, if we allow our cares to break up our devotional habits, and thus to draw us away from God, we are sure to draw down upon ourselves his displeasure, in addition to all other trials. And, when He takes up the rod to contend against us, who can tell how long or severely he may employ it ! God does not, indeed, afflict willingly, nor grieve unnecessarily, the children of men ; but he will not be neglected nor forgotten ; he will not allow himself to be deserted with impunity. God acts, invariably, with an express reference to our souls and eternity ; and, therefore, unless he were to abandon them to a desolate eternity, he must multiply or prolong our troubles, if we allow them to estrange our hearts and habits from the throne of grace.

This is not the view we are apt to take of the matter. When we are injured by treachery, or wounded by unkindness ; when the badness of the times, or the baseness of false friends, wring our hearts, until we can think of nothing else, we feel as if prayer, in this state of mind, would be mere mockery of God and useless to ourselves. The loss, the injury, and the wounds of the heart, which we have sustained, are so present to our minds, and press so upon all our feelings, and keep up such an agitation of soul, that

it seems impossible to pray. "What could we pray for at such a time and in such a temper?" In this way we reason. Or if we do try to pray as usual, we soon find that we cannot. We are so haunted and harassed by the recollection of our grievances, that every thing else is almost banished from our memory. We catch ourselves thinking of nothing else, even when our knees are bended, and our lips speaking before God. We find that, whilst going over our usual petitions, in words, we have been going over, in thought, the whole history of our injuries. "And this," we justly say, "is not praying." We even conclude that it is better to keep out of our closet altogether for a time, than to enter into it with such feelings uppermost in our minds.

This is the view we are inclined to take of the matter. And, at first sight, it seems very plausible. It manifests, however, a sad lack of common sense, as well as of gracious principle, when we thus give way to such excuses. For, what good can all our pondering upon our losses or crosses do? It will not repair the one, nor remove the other. We are, in fact, *doubling* our cares, every time we go over the history of them. Whilst thus placing them in every light, we are aggravating them. Whilst dwelling upon them, we are imbittering our remaining comforts, and actually risking the loss of every thing; for we may fret ourselves into a fever or phrensy, and thus be unfitted for all the duties and enjoyments of life.

It is upon this principle, as well as upon higher considerations, that God forbids all undue care. It cannot be indulged with safety to our health of body or mind, nor with benefit to any of our interests. Its direct tendency is to make all that is bad worse, and to imbitter all that is sweet in our lot. Accordingly, we have never mended any thing that was wrong, by vexing ourselves about it. Whenever we have got over any grievance, it has been by an effort to forgive it, or by praying down the memory of it. Peace and composure of mind have never been regained, until we returned to our old devotional habits. This return,

however, does not usually take place, until we are actually *tired* of brooding and fretting over our cares. We indulge "our vexation of spirit," until it work itself out by its own violence or is displaced by some more absorbing subject. This, however, is not the scriptural way of getting over the vexations and grievances of life. Leaving them to die a natural death is not Christian prudence. Yielding to their distracting influence, until we are sick of it, is not creditable to our principles, nor to our common sense. They ought to be met at once by prayer, and to be put down by it. And this is not impossible, however difficult it may seem at first sight. There is, in fact, no case of trial, in which prayer is not an effectual antidote against disquietude and corroding anxiety. "The peace of God" can and will keep both the "heart and mind" of those who cast all their care upon God, "by supplication and prayer, with thanksgiving." Nothing can resist the sweet influence of this devotional habit.

If we doubt the truth of this, there is some grand defect in our ideas of prayer itself, or in our manner of praying, in reference to cares and vexations. Prayer, under them, must be regulated by scriptural rules, if we would experience the benefit of it. Now, one of these rules is, that it must be "*with thanksgiving.*" If, therefore, we go to the throne of grace, only to deplore our losses, only to unbosom our cares, or only to make known our wants, we have no warrant whatever to expect support or peace under them. Our "requests" must be mingled with "thanksgiving" if we would succeed in obtaining "grace to help in time of need." No wonder! for even when our cares are heaviest, and our wants most pressing, we have much cause for gratitude. In general, the comforts which are left with us are more than those which are taken away, whether they be property, friends, or business. And even when what is left is nothing, compared with what is lost, there is always something remains worthy of being gratefully acknowledged. However prone, therefore, we may be to lose, in

what is lost, the recollection and estimate of what is left, God does not forget what is spared to us, nor forego his claims upon our gratitude. He will be acknowledged for what we have, as well as applied to for what we want. Instead, therefore, of going to our closets, only to pour out griefs before him, we ought to go also for the express purpose of reviewing with wonder, and recording with gratitude, every spared comfort and continued mercy. This is an essential part of the devotional process of throwing off undue carefulness; and, accordingly, it is also an effectual part.

“But,” it may be said, “who can engage in thanksgiving, when his heart is bleeding by unkindness, or treachery, or bereavement?” Why, all whose hearts have any hope of salvation. Is the hope of eternal life such a trifle as to be unworthy of, or unfit for, a song of praise, whenever any of the comforts of this life are taken away? What a poor hold of it we must have, if we can forget it in the day of calamity! What a low estimate we have formed of it, if it can be insipid whenever we are put out of the way by temporal things! I do not think lightly of cares or crosses, vexations or grievances—they are hard to bear; but what are they, compared with the wrath and curse of God, or with the agonies of despair? Any lot, out of hell, demands and deserves our fervent gratitude; and, where the hope of heaven is left in the bosom, no earthly loss can excuse silence. But, in general, how many other comforts are left with it! The friends who remain true to us are more than those who have betrayed us. Our losses have not left us destitute. Our bereavements have not made us homeless. If a few have wounded our hearts, more have tried to pour balm into them. Besides, God has never forsaken us. God has never hurt our feelings by unkindness. God has never betrayed our confidence. He has been faithful, watchful, and tender, throughout all his dealings with us. And shall the ingratitude or baseness of others turn us against him? Shall we cease to praise the Father of our mercies, because a fel-

low-creature deserves blame? Shall we resent our injuries upon God, upon our Saviour, or upon the Holy Spirit, by neglecting them, because others have acted unjustly towards us? The bare idea is equally shocking and absurd.

You see, you begin to feel now, that if after any harassing or unhinging event the first thing we did was—to retire into the presence of God, to consider, first, our untouched property, our untouched comforts, our untouched friends, and our untouched hopes, we could not be so overcome as we usually have been, nor so much put out of the way. The review of what is left would compel thanksgiving: and praise would fit the mind for prayer. But if we go into the closet choking and chafed with the sense of injury, and looking only at the persons who inflicted it, it is impossible to pray at all. Our breast must be cleared by *praise*, before it can be calmed by prayer, at such times.

This, however, is not the only thing necessary, in order to secure peace of mind under the trials of life. It is not every kind of praying that will meet our case. Even earnest supplication for pity and support is not fully to the point, when the heart is full of anger or vexation. Indeed, in that state, it cannot be comforted, and will not be humoured; for God will not countenance a bad spirit in his children. He may not always “rebuke” a wrong spirit in them; but he will only sooth them by *subduing* it. And he will teach you, as he did Jonah, to cease from saying, “I do well to be angry.” Such being his rule in vouchsafing support and consolation to sufferers, it is self-evident that our prayers under the trials of life should include—

FIRST. *A distinct and humble acknowledgement of God’s supreme right to permit these trials.* Until this be confessed, it is impossible to pray with pleasure or advantage. Indeed, we are not *suppliants* at all, but *claimants*, whilst we consider it unjust or unkind, on the part of God, to permit these trials. As they come from the hand of man, they may be flagrantly unjust; but, as they come from the hand of God, they cannot be even unkind or unnecessary. They may be

wholly undeserved by us, so far as man is concerned ; but they are wholly deserved from God. He might justly permit and appoint far more and heavier trials than any we have ever experienced ; for, whatever they be, "he hath not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." We do not understand the evil of sin, nor the necessity of holiness, if we deny or doubt this. The *punishment* of sin is wrath to the uttermost ; and therefore, *chastisement* for sin, however severe, is, in fact, mercy.

It is by forgetting or overlooking this scriptural view of our trials, that they so fill us with care, and unfit us for devotion. We confine our attention to them as unmerited injuries from the hand of man, instead of regarding them also as merited chastisements from the hand of God. Accordingly, we cannot pray whilst we take this partial view of them. But we can pray, even when they press heaviest, if we are prepared to confess that we *deserve* them all and more, from God. This confession is itself, the best kind of prayer in times of trial. In fact no other kind of prayer will be of any use, until we fully acknowledge before God that his judgments are just. Whoever, therefore, would regain peace of mind, or get over the unhappy and unholy feelings created by cares and vexations, must make up his mind to go fully into the duty of confession, however painful or mortifying it may seem to him at first. It will amply repay him ! He will feel himself a *new* man, from the moment he has humbly bowed to the sentence of God. The act of humiliation will pluck from his bosom the canker of pride, and thus make room again for the peace of God.

SECONDLY. *Our prayers under the trials of life, must include a distinct acknowledgment of the wisdom and kindness of God.* It is both wise and kind, as well as just, on the part of God, to try the faith and patience of believers. For how else could we fully ascertain the sincerity of our faith or love ? We often doubt it, and pray that God would put it beyond all doubt. Now, the ordinary trials of life are the best tests of our sincerity : far better than extraor-

dinary calamities are. Under heavy calamities we *must* submit, because we cannot resist. They also break down or soften the spirit so that it is difficult to decide whether our feelings, under them, are from the weakness of nature, or the strength of grace. Whereas the trials which leave us in full possession of all our faculties, and with some opportunities of surmounting them, prove what our principles are and can bear. When therefore we do not, and dare not, quit the narrow way, even when it is thorny and rugged, our sincerity is demonstrated to ourselves and others. And it is delightful to feel that, though disconcerted and somewhat discouraged, the Saviour is dearer to us than any thing we have lost. Then the soul gets a clear sight of its own principles, as John did when he said, "this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith." Now, if it be wise to bring us thus fully to the point, it must be *kind* to employ means which do it effectually. In praying, therefore, under them, this must be acknowledged before God. And the way to bring out the acknowledgment is to press home upon ourselves the questions, which is better, to be uncertain of the reality of my faith, or to be sure of it? To know that my heart is right with God, or to be in perpetual doubt of it? To feel sure that I am won to the cross by the worth of salvation, and not bribed to it by the comforts of life? Such questions search the heart and the reins. They throw us upon the *meaning* of our professions of faith and love. We have often said with Paul, "yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss that I may be found in Christ;" and this is easily said, when we are *losing* nothing. Accordingly it is doubtful, and not "doubtless," in our case, until we have "suffered the loss" of something, without shrinking from Christ. Paul had suffered the loss of "all things," when he avowed his adherence to the Saviour; and, therefore, all things in his lot, and conduct, and temper, echoed back his "*doubtless.*"

To pray in the spirit thus characterized and commended, is not, indeed, easy. It is almost impossible at first, or by

a direct effort. Such submission and gratitude, under vexing and wasting cares, can only be acquired by concentrating our prayers, for a time, upon our *eternal* interests. They must be all in all, before our temporal interests can be seen in their true light. The temporal will seem unduly important, until the eternal appear as they are—ininitely important! No one can calmly lose this world's goods, or keep a loose hold of them, who has not a firm hold upon the glories of the world to come. His efforts to reason down, or pray down, disquietude, will defeat themselves, until he "can read" or determine to read

" His title clear,  
To mansions in the skies."

It was only when Paul looked at the things which were unseen and eternal, that he was able to counterbalance the weight of the things which were seen and temporal. And this maxim is as necessary in our case, however much less than his our trials may be.

Are you then safe for eternity? Are you *sure* of your personal interest in Christ and heaven? If not, let all your thoughts and prayers centre upon the settlement, the immediate and perfect settlement, of this chief point. This process will soon place temporal things before you, as they appear to a *dying* man. It is not by an effort that he forgets them—but by the influence of an opening eternity. Dwell, therefore, on the sides of eternity, with the question, "Am I safe?" until you can answer it before God and man, on scriptural grounds. Thus prayer will produce peace, even in your case.\*

\* See "ETERNITY REALIZED, or a Guide to the Thoughtful;" the third part of this volume.

## No. X.

## THE SAVIOUR'S DEVOTIONAL HABITS.

“JESUS went up into a mountain;” for what purpose? To view the Judean landscape, while the setting sun was flushing the lake of Gennesaret, and flinging his yellow radiance over the adjacent wilderness?—No.

“When the evening was come, Jesus was there *alone*.” Why?—That he might watch the rising of the evening star, and mark the lamps of heaven kindling in clusters and constellations throughout the hemisphere? No. Did he, then, ascend the mountain to enjoy repose? The Saviour needed rest at the time, for he had spent the day in healing the sick and feeding the hungry, under a scorching sun, and amidst a crowding multitude. But it was not for *rest* that he retired: “He went up to a mountain apart to *pray*.” Was this devotional exercise less sublime than gazing on the gilded landscape and the glowing firmament? Those who ascend mountains, voluntarily and alone, do so, in general, to indulge poetic or scientific taste; to command the prospect, and to commune with nature in silence and solitude. Jesus ascended to pray; and by prayer, to commune with God: a nobler communion than poets or philosophers ever had with nature, in her majestic or lovely scenes. And yet, how few are alive to the sublimity of devotional solitude! Praying in secret to the Father who seeth in secret, is an exercise equally solemn and august; but how little interest it excites to say of a man, *he is alone praying!*

Tell men of taste that their favourite poet is *alone* amidst the scenery of the lakes or the Grampians; alone on the Alps or the Andes; alone in the Coliseum of Rome, or amidst the Pyramids of Egypt; and immediately his admirers will realize his emotions, and dwell with him in

spirit, amidst clouds and cataracts, rocks and ruins, and feel as if he were more than mortal. But tell them that he is alone praying: and that moment the charm will be dissolved, and the man pitied as insane, or despised as fanatical. So lightly is devotional solitude esteemed!

Tell scientific men, that the first astronomer of the age is alone in the chief observatory in the world, with the most powerful telescopes ever lifted to the heavens; and all kindred minds will at once kindle in prospect of his discoveries. The silence and solitude of his post are held sublime, and felt to be in harmony with the silent sweep of the celestial orbs, and the music of the spheres. But tell his admirers that he often pauses, amidst the roll and radiance of the heavenly bodies, to pray; and although one of their own poets has said that

“An undevout astronomer is mad,”

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I.

his devotion will be esteemed madness or weakness.

“The poet’s eye, in a fine phrensy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,”

and is almost adored; but the penitent’s eyes, swimming in tears of contrition, and hardly daring to look up, even when *alone* before God, are despised by the generality of mankind. But “a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” The astronomer tracing the stars in their courses, and tracking the devious comet in its flight, is held to be a star of the first magnitude in mental system—strong in understanding, and lofty in genius. But the Christian, retired to pray, is held to be almost mean-spirited, and yet—he lifts his adoring eyes to heaven, of which the incarnate “brightness of the Father’s glory” is both “the morning star” and “the sun of righteousness;” and in his light sees the landscape of eternity illuminated—the valley of the shadow of death, irradiated with the Divine presence, and all the intermediate track of time basking under

the eye of Providence. Often, when alone praying, he finds his closet the very gate of heaven, and feels as if "open vision" would follow his intimate communion with God and the Lamb. Whatever, therefore, may be thought or said, by taste, science, or ignorance, of going apart and being alone to pray, devotional solitude is often exhilarating, and always soothing.

It is commended by the high example, and commanded by the high authority, of the Saviour:—

"Cold mountains, and the midnight air,  
Witnessed the fervour of his prayer."

His example does not, of course, enforce an ascent to a mountain in order to pray. He went up into a mountain from necessity—not from choice; because, as the Son of man, he had not where to lay his head; no home or closet. To those who have both, his command is, "Enter into thy closet." And we learn, from his example, that *inconvenience* must not prevent secret prayer. Here was the Saviour upon a lonely mountain—exposed to the cold winds and dews of the night—the ground damp beneath his knees, and the air chill around him; and yet he prayed—prayed long; the morning star often finding him where the evening star had left him. We have not such inconveniences to surmount. What is a cold room in winter, or a close room in summer, compared to the hoary side of a bleak and dreary mountain at midnight? And yet, how often are cold and heat allowed to hinder or hurry over secret prayer? Let sloth look to the Saviour's retirement, and blush! God might have enjoined us to ascend such a mountain whenever we prayed; and if he had commanded it, the duty would have been indispensable: but, in tender accommodation to our comfort, he has granted us, what he withheld from his incarnate Son—a house; and says, "Enter into thy closet."

The Saviour's example proves that the *fatigue* of labour must not prevent secret prayer. He had spent the day until the evening in active exertion amongst the multitude

that followed him into the wilderness. During all the time he had been under the burning sun in a sandy desert, and had afterward to ascend the mountain alone. And there—neither shelter nor refreshment awaited him; but, although thus exhausted and exposed, he closed the labours of the day by prayer. Now, his example ought to have all the authority of a law—all the influence of a charm upon his disciples. We do not come home more fatigued than he was. He had no house—no domestic comforts—neither shelter nor pillow for his sacred head; and yet he went apart to pray. He will remind the prayerless of this fact.

The Saviour's example proves that even deeds of *charity* and great exertions for the poor and afflicted, must not set aside secret prayer. He closed a day of mighty effort on behalf of suffering humanity, by going apart to pray. And surely if serving others must not prevent devotional solitude, serving ourself must not be allowed to do so; if acts of charity will not excuse neglect, the labours of industry cannot; if giving money to the poor be no plea for the omission of prayer, making money is not a valid one. Accordingly, while "diligence in business" is expressly enjoined, "fervency of spirit" in prayer, rests upon the same high and unalterable authority. Pray or perish is the alternative set before us in the gospel.

The Saviour's example proves that no *strength* of character or of grace can render devotional solitude unnecessary. He who had the Spirit without measure—who knew no sin—who was full of grace, and in whom Satan could find nothing to work upon—He went apart to pray. He held neither the fulness of his Godhead, nor the perfection of his humanity, as a reason for restraining prayer. And surely nothing that we have "attained" can render us independent of secret devotion! "The servant is not greater than his Lord." If, therefore, Satan, or sloth, or pride, say we may do with less prayer than at first, let us hear the insinuation as we should the assertion that we can do with less glorying in the Cross than we began with.

But here an important question forces itself upon the

mind—Why did the Saviour pray? He did pray often and fervently; and the fact has been perverted into an argument against his proper divinity. But remember what he prayed for; it was chiefly for *others*; and when it was for himself, never for ability to *save*—never for virtue to give efficacy to his *atonement*—never for strength to *redeem*. No—all his petitions in his own behalf were for the helps required by his human nature. He could, indeed, have drawn on the resources of his own personal Godhead: but it was necessary that the co-operation of the Father in the work of redemption should appear; and, therefore, all the dependance of his humanity was thrown on the Father's good will: and thus prayer was rendered both necessary and proper. Besides, secret devotion is more than prayer: it is also *communion* with God. Now, what is more natural, and consistent, and becoming, than that the Son should retire to commune with the Father? For, having dwelt in his bosom from eternity, it might be expected that he would maintain the original intimacy, both for its own sake, and that it might be known that neither distance nor incarnation had interrupted their fellowship. Instead, therefore, of derogating from its divinity, such prayer harmonizes with the highest ideas of godhead—being in fact a specimen of its devout communion. Besides, in praying, as in all practical duty, the Saviour was acting as the *example* of his followers. He had taught his disciples to pray: and he illustrated and enforced the lessons by his own devotional habits: and if it was worthy of his divinity to inculcate devotion, it could not be unworthy of him to *exemplify* it. “When he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them:” he sent them into secret to pray, and he himself went apart to pray.

The Saviour consulted our interest as well as our Father's glory, when he enjoined devotional solitude upon his disciples. For, in the *best* frame of mind, a Christian requires to be alone at times. The privacy of the domestic altar is not sufficiently “apart,” when the heart is full and overflowing with adoring and melting views of sovereign

and free grace. The full-souled exclamation, "Why me, Lord!" with its tones and tears, is fit only for the ear of God. And when the witness of the Spirit is strong, and the seal of the spirit bright; when the soul is borne away amongst "the deep things of God, and the dazzling scenes of eternity—we must be alone, or lose one half of the enjoyment. Even a family, however endeared, would be a check, at these sacred moments, on the full flow of devotional feelings, and on the flush of a hope full of immortality. Solitude is the real element of these raptures. But then—the Christian is not alone; the mount of communion is covered with "horses of fire, and chariots of fire." He is alone "with an innumerable company of angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect."

Solitude is also peculiarly suitable to the *worst* frames of a Christian's mind. The tones and terms in which backsliding, or indeed any sin, can be deplored in the domestic or social circle, are both too general and tame for the emotions of a contrite spirit. David was alone when he said, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Asaph was alone when he said, "I was as a beast before thee." Ephraim was alone when he smote upon his thigh and acknowledged that he had been as "a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." And our secret sorrows and shame are not fit even for the ear of our families. They might be misunderstood and misinterpreted by others; whereas, He who hears in secret can heal in secret. And what a sanctuary is solitude for the expression of all those feelings which, even at home, can only be breathed in general and gentle terms! It will not do to utter before our families all our fears of death, nor all our anxieties for them. It will not do to unburden and unbo-som all the heart to any one but God. God seeth and heareth in secret. What a mercy! What a wise and kind arrangement! "It is good for me to draw night unto God," alone!

## No. XI.

## COMMUNION WITH GOD IN AFFLICTION.

WHILST it is still true that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God," it is, happily, our lot to live at a time, and in a place, free from the fiery trial of persecution and martyrdom. Neither bonds nor imprisonments await us in the service of God. Our property is safe, and our good name hardly in danger. "Cruel mockings," for righteousness' sake, do not come from the *public* voice now; and "scourgings," for the sake of Christ, would be denounced even by the enemies of the cross of Christ.

This happy change in the public mind and manners demands our grateful acknowledgments. For if we are at times staggered and almost overwhelmed by the ordinary trials of life, what would be the effect of such fiery trials as the first Christians had to endure? If we call, and feel our heaviest troubles to be, a *furnace*, what should we have thought of the Babylonian furnace and the flames of martyrdom? If we shrink from a sneer or sarcasm, now that it is no longer backed by the sword, how should we have acted when it was the signal for guards to arrest, or for the rabble to stone, Christians?

These are not the trials of our times. It was, however, to such trials, chiefly, that the greatest of the "great and precious promises" refer. It is not exactly of chronic nor acute diseases of the body, that the Saviour and the apostles speak when they comfort the church under her manifold afflictions. It was not over sick-beds by name, nor over mere death-beds by name, that they opened the visions of all-sufficient grace, and of an eternal weight of glory; but over racks, and scaffolds, and dungeons.

These facts are startling at first sight! They are, however, facts; and, therefore, should neither be concealed nor overlooked. We, indeed, have formed the habit of applying any promise of grace or strength to any trial whatever.

We do not hesitate to draw as freely upon the "strong consolation" of the well-ordered covenant, when in sickness or pain, as the *martyrs* did when they were imprisoned and impaled. With not a tittle of their sufferings we lay claim to all their supports—so far as these were derived from the promises.

Now, it is not to dispute the propriety of this conduct that I place it in this light. It is highly proper that all suffering Christians, whatever be the kind or degree of their trials, should take to themselves all the consolation which is to be found in the word of God. It is, however, equally proper that they should clearly understand their warrant and welcome to do so. For, it is not right *because they do so*; but because God *allows* it to be done. It will, therefore, be best done by those who understand best the divine warrant for comforting themselves with the great and precious promises.

Look, then, at the facts of the case. These promises were made, in the first instance, to Christians whose lives, property, and reputation, were in constant peril because of their adherence to Christ. And yet these very promises you apply in your own case, under the natural diseases and decay of the body; under the losses and crosses incident to the ordinary business of life; under the vexations and sorrows inseparable from all human affairs. Now, where and what is your warrant for this appropriation of comforts which belonged, originally, to sufferers who were "*a spectacle to the world and to angels?*" What right have you to draw from the sacred fountains which were opened to refresh martyrs and confessors? Is it the lunacy of self-love that has betrayed you into a false estimate of your own importance? Or, is it the love of God that has made "all the promises, *yea and amen*, in Christ Jesus," to all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, whatever be the kind or the degree of their afflictions?

This is the fact. Accordingly there is not one well-ordered covenant for slight sufferers; and another better-

ordered covenant for great sufferers ; but one “ordered in all things and sure,” for both alike. For, however the spirit of God may have applied these strong consolations more sensibly and fully to the hearts of the martyrs, than he does now to our hearts, it was these consolations that he did apply. As it is the same pole-star in calm and in storm, on a wreck and in a new ship, that the seaman steers his course by—so it is the same light which shines from the promises upon all the afflicted children of God, whatever be the difference of their afflictions. “*Were it not so, I would have told you,*” is an expression of the Saviour, which may well and safely be applied here. Indeed, “were it not so,” another covenant, or an alteration of “the new covenant,” would and must have been introduced when persecution was withdrawn. But the consolations were not changed when the sufferings were changed. The scaffolds are fallen, but the covenant standeth fast ; the sword is sheathed, but the balm of Gilead is undiminished ; the flames are quenched, but the prospects of future glory remain undiminished. These assertions require to be proved by facts and confirmed by reasons. Now, it is the fact—

1. That believers sustain the same relation to God that the martyrs did. Christians did not cease to be the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, when they ceased to be the victims of persecution. Adoption remains the same under our “vine and fig-tree,” where none dare to make us afraid, as under the cross, the stake, or the axe of martyrdom. All who love the Saviour are as much the children of God as the noble army of Martyrs.

This is true even when we are not suffering under the mighty hand of God ; and surely it does not become untrue when we are under the rod. Chastisement is itself a proof of sonship. “*If ye endure chastisement,*” says Paul, “*God dealeth with you as with sons.*”

Here, then, is the first ground which you should take in order to communion with God, when his fatherly hand presses heavily upon your spirits. Its pressure does not

disprove your sonship. Even its long continuance does not render your adoption doubtful. God does not cast off when he casts down. For wise and gracious purposes he empoverishes many of the children and chastises them all ; but he never *disinherits* any of them. They may think, and even say, in the day of calamity, " Surely, God would not put such a bitter cup into my hand, if I were a child of his : surely, he would not contend so long and sharply if he had put me amongst his children ! " But all this is a mistake. The argument should run just the other way. The reverse is the truth, however difficult it may be to believe so at first. It is difficult, I readily grant. But, look again, and more fully, at your own case. Before this heavy trial came upon you, you ventured to hope that you were a child of God. Why ? Your freedom from this affliction was no proof nor mark of sonship. Neither the ease, nor the comfort, of your former circumstances, gave you any right or reason for cherishing the hope of adoption. Accordingly, you did not think then that they did. Remember ; any hope you ventured to take up then, was founded entirely upon the work of Christ and the word of God. And had any one asserted or insinuated, at that time, that you were grounding the hope of sonship upon your *temporal* circumstances, you would have disclaimed, with warmth, the unworthy imputation, and affirmed that Christ was " all in all " in your hope. Well ; if *easy* circumstances had, thus, nothing to do with the spirit of adoption when you began to enjoy it—what have *trying* circumstances to do with it ? It does not belong to prosperity, as such ; nor to adversity, as such. It is the fruit of faith in the atonement ; and the atonement is not altered in its essence or aspect, however the aspect of Providence may be changed. All your real ground for considering God as your Father, and for pouring out your heart to him, remains, therefore, the same as ever. Or, if there be any alteration in it, it is for the *better* ; for you are warranted to put an interpretation upon your adversity, which prosperity will not often bear. The trials of

believers are declared, by God, to be proofs of sonship; but their worldly prosperity is never explained in this way. It is the fact—

2. That the present sufferings of believers are sent for the same moral purpose as the persecution of the martyrs was permitted—by God.—Now, as far as that moral purpose terminated in themselves, it was, that “*they might be partakers of his holiness,*” and thus conformed to the image of his Son. And as this is the grand and final purpose of God, in the case of all his children, he has left open to them all, the same “wells of salvation” that he laid open to the first believers. It is, therefore, because God is pursuing the same end, now, as then, that he continues to us all the original motives to holiness. It was endeared to martyrs and confessors by the hope of eternal life—by the promise of sufficient grace—by the witness of the Spirit—and by the special presence of God. Without these, even *their* trials would not have produced true holiness. Neither racks nor flames would have purified their hearts, apart from the consolations of the gospel.

It is not, therefore, entirely wonderful, that all the promises remain, and hold equally good, in our case. They are wanted—they are indispensably necessary, if we are to be made partakers of the divine holiness. Nothing else, and nothing less, than the “good hope through grace,” granted to the first believers, is sufficient to sanctify present or future believers. For sanctification is not the effect of affliction, any further than affliction sends us to the Word and Spirit of God. Indeed, affliction itself requires to be sanctified; for its natural influence and inevitable consequence, when unaccompanied by the mighty working of the holy Spirit, are, to harden the heart. “Why should ye be stricken any more?” said Isaiah, to the Jewish church, when they had vexed and grieved the Holy Spirit: “*ye will only rebel more and more.*”

Here, then, is another ground upon which communion with God may be renewed in your case. And it is as solid

as holiness is essential. Now, you know and believe that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And you *feel* that the strokes of his Providence are destroying both the power and the love of sin. You may be unhinged, and agitated, and almost overwhelmed, by your trials; but they are not strengthening your besetting sin, nor lessening your hatred or fear of any sin. Whatever else be their effect upon you, they are not softening the aspect of evil, nor increasing your love to the world. The reverse is their effect. The world seems to you a poor portion for your immortal soul; and all sin is more than ever hateful. And are *you* afraid to pray? Do *you* doubt the paternal aspect of your chastisement? What! holiness advancing—and you doubting your *sonship*? Sin abhorrent—and you unchristianizing yourself? Why, if any thing be certain, it is that a soul dying to the world and sin is *alive* unto God. “*In this the children of God are manifest.*”

Consider! the salutary effect of your trials, in thus setting your heart against all that is hateful to God, proves far more in *favour* of your interest in the love of God, than your trials prove against it. You say, that you cannot reconcile them with an interest in the *love* of God. I say—that you cannot reconcile their holy influence with any suspicion of the *hatred* of God. But, what is my opinion on this subject? God himself says, that “*whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*” Mark: he does not say that whom he loveth—he prospereth in the world; but whom he chasteneth. If, then, your afflictions are producing the same holy effect as those promoted in the martyrs, by “*great tribulation,*” you are as much warranted, as they were, to regard God as your God for ever and ever, and to calculate upon Him being your guide until death.

Now, it is by believing this that you must regain your composure and freedom in prayer. You cannot regain them in any other way. For when the spirit of prayer is lost, under the mysterious dispensations of Providence, it

can only be recovered by turning to the mystery of grace. And, according to that, things are never wrong, nor going wrong, with the soul, when the work of *sanctification* is going on. Now, it is not going back, because you are less composed, and more shaken than usual. Composure is, indeed, a good thing in its proper place, and a good sign under certain circumstances:—but there is something better, both as a sensation and a sign; and that is—a heart agitated and agonized by a sense of the evil of sin. For many things may produce a tranquil mind; whereas it is only the Spirit of God that can create loathing and detestation against sin. Whoever, therefore, feels this, need not be afraid to commune with God as his own Father. Indeed, this itself is communion, or fellowship, in the very feelings which are the glory of his character—his love of holiness, and his hatred of sin. It is also the fact—

3. That nothing less than the hope of the glory which is to be revealed, can reconcile or sooth the mind, even under the present trials of life and godliness. A hope full of immortality is as much wanted in a sick chamber, as it was in a Roman prison; in poverty, as in spoliation; in the loss of relations by death, as in their loss by martyrdom. Perhaps more so, in one sense: for, in solitary or obscure affliction, there is no appeal made to our passions or senses; whereas, martyrdom, by its publicity and splendour, was calculated to inspire no small share of the fortitude it called for. But, however this may be, one thing is certain—that afflictions have not a sanctifying influence, nor are they well sustained, where there is not a well-founded hope of heaven. However strange it may be, therefore, in theory, that our inferior sufferings should have, or require, all the great and precious promises which were made to the first Christians, it is only the sober fact—that we do require them all, in order to possess our souls in patience. The prospect of heaven is not too bright, nor the consolation that is in Christ too strong, even in the day of *our* calamity. Whatever, therefore, might be theoretic-

cally argued, to prove that less ought to suffice, now that there is far less to suffer, the fact is that less does not suffice. All experience demonstrates that there is neither true holiness, nor happiness, under calamity, but where there is a good hope, through grace, of an eternal weight of glory. Now, this is the hope which must inspire and sustain communion with God in the furnace. This hope must be in the midst of every furnace of affliction, as the Son of God was in the Babylonian furnace, if, like the three Hebrews, we would be free or unhurt. Our own reasonings against impatience, and the remonstrances of others against it, will not prevent nor suppress impatience. It has but one effectual antidote—the hope of eternal life. The prospect of better days, and better things, in this life, is not, indeed, without its influence; but it is not in praying for them that the soul gets into communion with God. It is in praying for meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, that we obtain true and transporting fellowship with him.

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## No. XII.

### SACRAMENTAL COMMUNION WITH GOD AND THE LAMB.

IT is pleasing to remember how many, in all ages of the Christian church, have celebrated the death of the Saviour, at the sacramental table. That has never, indeed, been a crowded table, where the guests have been required to wear the “wedding garment;” but neither has it ever been a forsaken table. Some were always as constant at the sacramental supper on earth, as they are now at “the marriage supper of the Lamb” in heaven. Many of them commemorated his death at the risk of their own lives. The mountain tops were not too cold, nor the caves of the wilderness

too damp, nor the tombs, at midnight, too dreary, for the first Christians, when persecution drove them to *secret* sacraments. They loved their Lord; and, therefore, testified their attachment to him at all hazards, and under all hardships.

Such were the primitive believers. The world then thought them fools; but, now, even the world itself applauds their heroism; and remember them more than it does the guests who sat at the banqueting tables of the Belshazzars and Cesars of antiquity. It is pleasing to remember also, that there are now sacramental tables in many nations, where there was only "the tables of devils" then. When the first sacraments were celebrating in Judea and Greece, human sacrifices were prevalent and popular in Britain. Hallowed be the day, when the *first* Christian sacrament was administered in the land of our fathers! Its date is unknown: its place, unmarked; its form, uncertain; but its "sweet influences" have been incalculable. It was the "olive leaf," (whoever was the dove that brought it,) which proved that the flood of Druidism was subsiding.

It is pleasing to remember also, that even since we became communicants there are many sacramental tables, where there was only the table of devils when we were born. There is now one in China—a few in India—and many in Africa and the South Sea islands. And still they are multiplying. They will become as general as the domestic table of families; until all on earth vie with all in heaven, in "*showing the Lord's death until he come.*"

By thus remembering "the dead in Christ," and anticipating the unborn who shall be given to Christ, we forget, in some measure, or rather get above, our *own* fears and trials. We thus feel ourselves to be a part of an immense army—the first companies of which are already crowned with victory; and the last sure to be more than conquerors, by the blood of the Lamb. This identification is as useful as it is sublime.

When a Christian thinks only of himself, and for himself,

he is easily discouraged, and feels, at times, ready to sink. But when he realizes himself as one of God's family, and as one of Christ's flock, and remembers how many are arrived at the kingdom in safety, and how many are with him in the wilderness—he sees and feels that he, too, may overcome. Whilst he looks only at himself, he can hardly conceive how everlasting wings should be over him, nor how he should be welcome to take shelter under them. But when he pauses to observe how many they shelter, and how widely they are expanded, he is encouraged to creep under their shadow.

When he thinks only of himself, he can hardly see how the Saviour can take any lively or constant interest in him: nor how the Holy Spirit can bear with his infirmities: but when he pauses to consider, that the Great Shepherd's flock is too large to be forsaken by a good Shepherd, or by a Spirit who is "the Comforter," he feels that, although the weakest of the lambs of that flock, he may yet share in its Shepherd's tenderness, and venture into all its green pastures, and up to all its still waters, in company.

When he looks only at his own trials, he can hardly see how a special Providence should take up his case, or hold up his goings; but when he pauses to consider how many have been guarded and guided, and how many needs as much guidance and guardianship as himself—they are both so many, that he feels, through all his soul, that the God of love is not likely to leave nor forsake them; and thus he, too, ventures to cast all his care upon a wise and watchful Providence.

It is thus also that he is encouraged, at times, to venture to the Lord's table. His own sense of unfitness and unworthiness would keep him away, did not others, who confess the same, continue to come. Not that he gets over his fears by considering himself as good as others; but he sees that the best of others have had similar fears; and that, if they had yielded to them, they could never have become such exemplary Christians. He sees that there has been

an intimate and inseparable connexion between their growth in grace and their adherence to the sacrament. Nor can he overlook or forget the fact, that all that was bad has become worse, in the case of these who have given up sacraments. And thus these examples bring him to the point : " I may become," he says, " an apostate, by keeping away ! I may be established, strengthened, and settled, by keeping the feast."

These are not, indeed, the highest motives for adhering to the sacramental table ; but they are legitimate and powerful motives. So also is the consideration that your absence may injure or pain others. For, by not communing with your brethren, you may prevent or mar their communion with God. Some of them are sure to miss you, and almost as sure to be affected by it. Those, especially, who encouraged and welcomed you to the sacrament, and those also whom you may have encouraged and welcomed to it, cannot but wonder at your absence. They ought, indeed, to be better employed, than in thinking of an absent friend. The " Remembrance" of the Saviour ought to engross and absorb their whole soul. You feel and confess this. Do not, then, divide or divert their hearts from Him, by deserting them. Remember, how you would have felt, had you missed them, when you *began* to communicate ! And as their presence has often encouraged you, let your presence encourage them.

There is more connexion between this tender regard to the feelings of others, and communion with God, than seems generally understood. Many appear to imagine, that it is of little consequence how they *feel* towards their brethren, at the sacrament, if they are not at open variance with them. That, it is generally acknowledged, is incompatible with communion with God. And, whether acknowledged or not, it is found to be so, both by offenders and the offended. Neither find much comfort or benefit at the Lord's table, whilst breaches or heart-burnings are unhealed. This loss of enjoyment is not, however, confined to alienated brethren. It is sustain-

ed by *indifferent* brethren also ; and in a degree that ought to startle them, even if they are unconscious of any studied indifference. For the sacrament is as much intended to promote the fellowship of the members with each other, as the fellowship of the body with the head. Indeed, the *unbroken* bread is as truly and intentionally an emblem of a united church, as the broken bread is of the crucified Saviour. It is not enough, therefore, to remember the Saviour, when we approach his table. He, of course, should be the supreme object of our attention ; but not to the exclusion of the people. A kind look or thought towards them, will not displease him, nor distract us. He is not *jealous* of brotherly love.

We mistake sadly, when we imagine that we cannot afford to think at all of the church whilst we are at the sacrament. It is quite true, that we have each so much to think of in our own case, that it *seems* more than enough, at that time. Our own hearts are so unmanageable, that any concern for others appears both impossible and out of place, also when we are trying to commune with the Saviour for ourselves. But, what if a momentary identification of ourselves with our brethren should be the best way of getting into communion with the Saviour himself?—what if he who is “not ashamed to call them his brethren,” hide his face from us, until we from the heart acknowledge them as our brethren? This is not unlikely. Paul evidently held it to be certain, that, apart from being “rooted and grounded” in mutual love, believers could not “comprehend the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, of the love of Christ.” Now these are

“The sweet wonders of the cross,”

that we desire to comprehend at the sacrament. But, apart from cherishing unfeigned love to the brethren, we are not warranted to expect any enrapturing or realizing manifestation of them. For, do remember—it is as much in con-

nexion with loving one another, as with loving himself, that the Saviour promises to "manifest" himself to his disciples.

"This is the law of the house." And it is as reasonable as it is authoritative. You may have overlooked it hitherto, or not weighed it duly. But it is intimately connected with all the enjoyment which the sacrament is intended to promote. And if you have wondered and wept, because you have often missed enjoyment at the sacrament, it is high time for you to search out the secret causes of your disappointment.

Now, whatever other causes may have led to the loss of sacramental enjoyment, the want of a really "right spirit" towards your brethren is one cause of it. You may not, indeed, have behaved ill, nor carried yourself haughtily towards any of them. No one may have any just reason to complain of your conduct or spirit, as a communicant. You may be able even to appeal to all the church, and to the omniscience of its Head, that you injure no one, and despise no one. But whilst all this is very credible to you, and more than many can say for themselves, it is not all that devolves on you, even if you can add to it, that you never refuse to help the poor of the flock. All this may be done, without "charity." 1 Cor. xiii. 3. The real question to meet is, Do you love the brethren for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them, and because they are your brethren in Christ? This is the grand apostolic reason for mutual love in the church. But if you love only a few, who happen to please you; and them, chiefly, for what they are to you, rather than for what they are to Christ, you overlook this reason, and make yourself the centre of your affections. You may not intend to do this; but it comes to this, if you care little or nothing about those who are not your personal friends. You ought, indeed, to love them who love you; but you are equally bound to love all who love the Saviour.

It will not do, in answer to this, to say, that you stand in doubt of some of your fellow-members. That may be your

own fault, in regard to some of them. They may be as worthy as yourself, if you knew them as well. And, in the case of those who are justly doubted, it is your duty to be faithful to them. If you know, to a certainty, that any nominal brother is an immoral man, you are as much bound to reprove him, and to bring the matter to an issue, as he is bound to reform.

It is not necessary, however, to go into extreme cases. It is not from them, that the neglect of brotherly love springs chiefly; but from our own inattention to the law of that love. Now, it is exceeding broad! It embraces all the personal friends of the Saviour, just because they are his friends. You are bound to love them, because He has loved them, even as He has loved us; and because they love him as sincerely as we do. Accordingly we should feel and admit the force of this claim at once, were we to sit down to an African or an Indian sacramental table. There—it would be impossible to look round upon a circle of brethren without a glow of brotherly love. Our hearts would thrill at the sight of so many brands plucked from the burning. We could not suppress our love to them, were we to try the experiment. We could not, by any effort, go into a cold and jealous calculation of their comparative rank or worth. All such considerations would be swallowed up, in the high consciousness that we were associated with the friends of Jesus.

And are his friends less valuable at home? Is there less of his love displayed in a church of British, than in a church of African, converts? Why, then, do we not take an equal interest in the former?

The cases are not, indeed, parallel, in all respects. An African church is a novelty; whereas a British church is almost a matter of course; and we are too much the creatures of circumstances, to be as much affected by what is common as by what is uncommon. I readily grant, therefore, that the appeal to our senses is not the same at home that it would be abroad. Any group of Africans or Indians,

would, however engaged, arrest our attention, and interest our feelings, more than the same number of our own countrymen, similarly engaged. Africans, themselves, would be less affected by the sight of a British church than we should by the sight of an African church;—because they must, of course, regard it as only what might be expected in Britain.

These concessions and distinctions ought to be made. But, after making them, thus fully and freely, there is still enough in the case, both to warrant and point an argument, on behalf of brotherly love at the sacrament. For, the utmost that can be said of any church, in heathen lands, is, that “*Christ loved them and gave himself for them.*” Their calling and election cannot be carried higher than to the purpose of God; nor their redemption higher than to the blood of the Lamb; nor their conversion higher than to the power of the Holy Spirit, and to this height, the salvation of all may be equally traced. There is, therefore, a defect in our spiritual discernment, whenever we look upon real converts, without real pleasure. For we should be delighted to meet the lowest of them in heaven! There, we shall never think of what was their rank on earth. It will be enough to secure our love, there, that they were loved by our Father, and ransomed by our Saviour, and sanctified by our Comforter. Every believer we meet around the throne will be hailed and held as a “brother,” because he is a “companion” in the New Song of the cross. Why, then, should it not be so on earth?

These are not the considerations which you expected to be most prominent, in an essay on sacramental communion with God and the Lamb. You, most likely, began to read it, in the hope that you might find some touching hints, which would warm or melt your heart; and, thus, enable you to “go unto the altar of God,” with more joy, or composure, than you could command when you were there last. Are you, then, disappointed? You ought not to be so. You have, indeed, a right to expect that a minister, en-

forcing and commending the sacrament, should, also, bring before you a full-orbed view of the great sacrifice which it commemorates. For that, being the chief thing, ought to have the chief place. Well; just because it is the chief thing in the sacrament, I am intent on placing you in that spirit and position towards it, which are most in accordance with it. Now, that accordant disposition is, identification with all who are "heirs together," with you, "of the grace of life:" and that accordant spirit is, love to them as joint heirs of eternal life.

It is, also, of great importance to bear in mind that *mournful* sacraments are not useless. We are apt to regard these sad solemnities as sad disappointments; and, if we miss enjoyment, to imagine that we have communicated in vain. But this is a mistake.

Neither God nor the Lamb is dishonoured or displeased, nor are we unprofited, when sacraments do nothing but *humble* us. We have not come to the altar in vain, when we retire from it wondering that our blood was not mingled with our sacrifices. Nothing is useless that compels us to lay our "mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope." And this is the effect of our sad sacraments. They lay us in the very dust of self-abasement. And, what is not less valuable, they make us feel through all our soul that we need more than ever to be watchful. For now that we cannot wring from our hearts one warm emotion, nor command one holy feeling, how easily temptation might overcome or trials overwhelm us! The solemn questions—"Where will all this end?—What has brought on this utter loss of first love?"—reveal, as they flash across our darkened spirit, dangers which make us tremble both at and for ourselves. Now, although such dread discoveries, like afflictions, are not joyous but grievous; "nevertheless, afterward," they yield "the peaceful fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised by them."

When, however, there is a succession of sad or dull sacraments; and when communicants, month after month,

retire from the altar of God, weeping or trembling; and where the desolation of soul cannot be traced to the indulgence of any bad habit or temper, there must, in such a case, be some misapprehension of the gospel. Now, the most prevalent mistake is that faith cannot work *empty-handed*; or that the principle of it can work by love, even when it is not exercised in believing the promises of the God of love. Faith is, indeed, a principle and a vital one; but (like the bee's power of making honey, which is of no use apart from the nectar of flowers) it cannot work by love without believing the motives to love. The bee cannot make honey from water, nor yet from the dew of the morning; no more can faith extract comfort or hope from threatenings, or produce joy by dwelling on the dark side of things. We might just as well, and more wisely, expect that our power of seeing should cheer us apart from *looking*; or our power of hearing apart from *listening*, as expect that faith can comfort us apart from believing "comfortable words." Why are we so prone to drop all our *common sense*, when we try to exercise or examine our faith? Whenever we want to be cheered by the power of seeing, we look abroad on the landscape of nature, or on the achievements of art, and dwell on their beauties and sublimities until the eye affects the heart. We never gaze on vacancy, nor on deformity, when we wish to be delighted. In like manner, when we are intent on being cheered by the exercise of the power of hearing, we place ourselves where the groves are most melodious, or where the instruments are best toned, or where the voices have the most compass and variety; and thus we prepare to enjoy music. All this is natural and necessary. And, is it not equally so, if we would be cheered by faith, to believe cheering truths? We might as well roll our eyes in darkness, or fix them upon a blank, and then doubt their visual power, as judge of our faith whilst we abstain from trying to believe the glad tidings of salvation. This will never do, at the sacrament, nor any where else, that comfort is needed.

Wherever we come to God, we must believe that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. In no duty, and at no ordinance, can we be happy without believing the promises with which it is connected, and of which it is the pledge. And we are as welcome to embrace them, as to obey it. Now, we never doubt our obligation to obey the laws of God: but the moment we look at them, we feel bound by their authority, and awed by their sanctions. So we ought to judge and feel. We are not, however, more bound to revere them than we are welcome to believe the gospel. The promises are just as free to our faith, as the commandments are binding on our conscience. Conscience, without the law, would be an insufficient and unsafe guide; and Faith, without the promises, would be a miserable comforter, and a fruitless principle.



# ETERNITY REALIZED;

OR A

## GUIDE TO THE THOUGHTFUL.

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### No. I.

#### THE DUTY OF REALIZING ETERNITY.

DID "ETERNAL LIFE" suggest to us only the bare idea of living for ever in an unknown world, it would deserve more attention than is usually given to heaven or hell. "The life that now is," is such an evanescent vapour, that "everlasting life," however deeply veiled as to its place or employments, is a contrast which ought to arrest and rivet supreme

attention. The bare fact of immortality is fraught with instruction and warning. It has a commanding character, independent of its revealed character. For, as life involves thought, and feeling, and action; an eternity of thinking, an eternity of feeling, an eternity of acting, is a solemn consideration! It could not be weighed without profit. Who would not be improved, both in character and spirit, by arguing thus:—"I must *think* for ever; would an eternal train of my usual thoughts be either worthy of me, or useful to me? I must *feel* for ever; would an eternal reign of my present spirit and desires please me? I must *act* for ever; would an eternal course of my habitual conduct bring happiness, or even bear reflection?"

We could not bring our tastes and tempers to this test, without improving both. The moment we realize an eternity of any vice or folly, we are shocked. To be eternally passionate, or eternally sensual, or eternally covetous, or eternally capricious, is a state of being which must be appalling and repulsive even to the victims of these vices. Thus, independent of all the light shed upon immortality by the gospel, immortality itself sheds strong and steady lights upon our personal interests and relative duties. Life involves, also, society, intercourse, and their natural results. Would, then, an eternity of the terms and temper of our present domestic and social life be altogether agreeable to us? Should we like to "live for ever," just as we now "live together" at home? Would an eternity of our present feelings towards certain persons be either creditable or useful to us? Should we be quite satisfied to obtain and deserve, for ever, no more respect than we now enjoy? Would an immortality of our present relative condition please us? Here, again, by realizing an eternity of social life, we catch glimpses both of duty and interest, which compel "great searchings of heart," and suggest many valuable improvements of character.

It would, then, be equally unwise and criminal, not to realize even a veiled eternity. It would be both moral and

mental weakness not to judge of our present character and pursuits—of our present spirit and habits—by their fitness and likelihood to please and profit us in a “world without end.” What attention, then, is due to an unveiled and illuminated immortality; and, what an influence it might have over us, if habitually realized as it is revealed? It comes before us, in the gospel, as everlasting happiness in heaven, or as everlasting misery in hell; as an eternity in the presence of God, and in the fellowship of all the godlike spirits in the universe; or, as an eternity in the presence of “the devil and his angels,” and in the society of all the impious and impure. Extremes, thus infinite and endless, deserve all the attention which law or gospel demands for them. Habitual remembrance of them would be imperative duty, if neither law nor gospel enforced it. Such an eternity makes many laws for itself. It is *itself* a law, and felt to be so when it is realized. For as Sinai awed the thousands of Israel, by its solemn aspect, long before the trumpet sounded, so the very aspect of eternal bliss or woe appeals to the understanding and the conscience, by its own solemnity.

Now we blame as well as pity, those who banish the consideration of this unveiled immortality. We are thankful that we are not so mentally weak, as to be incapable of reflecting on the things which are “unseen and eternal;” nor so mortally infatuated as to be utterly unaffected by them. We had rather lose one of our bodily senses, than be wholly insensible to the glories and solemnities of the world to come. We see clearly, and often feel deeply, that without some just sense of them, there cannot be a due appreciation of the claims of the law or the gospel, nor of the duties of life and godliness. These have all such an express reference to eternity, that if we were to think and act without any pointed reference to it, we durst not give ourselves credit either for believing or for understanding truth and duty.

This is well, so far. It is, however, one thing to be

unable or unwilling to forget eternity ; and another, to *cultivate* the remembrance of it. We may not evade the prospect, when it is forced upon us by death in the family, or by appeals in the sanctuary ; but, do we invite it, for its own sake, when there is neither accident nor excitement to constrain our attention ? Is the contemplation of "the powers of the world to come," any part of our devotional and meditative habits ? We voluntarily and conscientiously *give* some set time to prayer, and to self-examination, and to the study of the great principles of truth and duty. We do not allow our sense of them to depend entirely upon accident or excitement. We require, in order to keep up a good hope through grace, to examine and review the grounds of hope ; and, in order to maintain a good conscience towards God and man, we require to confront conscience, from time to time, with the claims of both. But, do we require, for own satisfaction and improvement, to set apart some time for the deliberate and distinct consideration of the claims of eternal life ? They are, indeed, *mixed up* in our minds with the other claims of religion and morality, and give some degree of force to both : but if they are rather admitted than meditated, rather taken for granted than weighed, we do not give that "good need" to them which they demand and deserve.

The prospects of eternal life are revealed to us, that we may employ them to counterbalance the pressure of the sufferings and sorrows of "the life which now is." They were habitually employed for this purpose, by those who first believed that gospel which illuminated life and immortality. They did more than calculate, that all their trials were working together "for good." They reckoned, also, that their "affliction" was working for them "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." They realized heaven so as to be relieved and refreshed by the anticipations of it. But what in general, is our resource under suffering and sorrow ? Alas ! not this direct and distinct reckoning, that they are not "worthy to be compared with

the glory which shall be revealed in us ;” but reckoning, that good will come out of them, and that we shall see better days “in the land of the living.” Better days in the land of the *dead*, are not much desired by us whilst we have any rational hope of life. I mean—that it is not by them, chiefly, we balance our troubles, whilst death does not seem inevitable nor at hand. There is, in fact, something dearer to us, at present, than heaven. We have no wish to be *soon* there, however much we desire or hope to be found there at last. Accordingly, the hope of glory is not often our chief consolation in the day of calamity.

Now this proves more, than that our personal hope is often low and fluctuating. It proves, also, that we are not very familiar with the objects of future happiness. Indeed, one great cause of that lowness and changeableness of our hope of heaven is, our inattention to heaven itself. It is not often nor minutely contemplated, exactly as it is set before us in the gospel. We do not overlook eternal things, but we do not “*look at*” them one by one, nor as a whole, sufficiently. We have no low nor foolish notions of heaven, but we have many vague, and not a few unimportant, ideas of it. The reason is obvious : we have not taken the same time or care to acquaint ourselves with it, that we have taken to form and mature our acquaintance in the *way* which leads to it. Our knowledge of “the way that leadeth to everlasting life” is not, indeed, perfect ; but still, it is influential. We prize our deliberate views and convictions of the glory and grace of the atonement ; we can make something of them, and sometimes *much*, in the day of trouble ; and they *tell* well upon our character and spirit even in the day of prosperity. So does our general idea of heaven ; but not so the *details* of our knowledge of it ; they have not much influence. How could they ? The greater part of them have no fixed nor definite character or form in our minds. Were our views of the doctrine of grace as vague as many of our opinions about glory are, we

should feel ashamed of ourselves, and be far more uncomfortable than we are now.

Whatever scrutiny or remonstrance breathes in these remarks, is not uncalled for by the usual state of our minds. Slight views of eternal life, are one great cause of our slight hold on the hope of salvation. A deeper acquaintance with immortality, in all its revealed forms, would compel us to take and keep a firmer grasp of the cross. Were we daily "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ *unto eternal life,*" as well as unto a holy and tranquil life, both our faith and prayers would breathe another spirit than they usually do; and thus we should soon have no occasion for the common complaint, that our hope of heaven is too weak to weigh much against the trials of life. Let eternity dictate the *measure of faith* in Christ which its own solemnity deserves; and this will lead to such solid building, and to such steady resting upon the Rock of Ages, that we shall soon have a hope so full of immortality, that, like the first believers, we shall be able to counterbalance the things which are seen and temporal, by the things which are unseen and eternal. And, surely, if the martyrs could do so, we well may, under our lighter afflictions. It is, therefore, our own interest to acquire such a hold upon heaven, as shall really be of *use* to us in the time of trouble. Nothing aggravates trouble so much as a dark cloud on our eternal prospects. We have need of all our time and strength for the due exercise of patience and resignation in the evil day, instead of having to clear up, then, the agitating question of personal safety. Let us not, therefore, believe the gospel so vaguely and vapidly now, nor obey the law so partially now, that when the dark side of the pillar of time turns upon us, the dark side of the pillar of eternity should turn upon us too. There is no occasion for such a conjunction, as the fear of "the blackness of darkness," blending with the clouds of temporal calamity.

We owe it also unto others to cultivate such a hope of glory, as shall have a visible influence upon our *spirits*, as

well as upon our character ; and upon our *conversation*, as well as our conduct. Without worth of character, no testimony to the worth of religion will have any weight in our family, or social circle. It is not enough, however, that both our careless and undecided friends should be constrained, by our general character, to conclude, "that if any get to heaven we shall." Our *words*, as well as our works, should aid in lodging this conviction in their minds. We ought to *speak* of our "inheritance with the saints in light," as well as cultivate meetness for it. The first believers not only thought of heaven, and prepared for it, they also avowed and proclaimed the pleasure they found in looking forward to it as rest from their labours, and as freedom from their imperfections. They did not leave the inference of their safety to be drawn by others only; they drew it themselves also. They were wise enough, and manly enough, to judge, that a character and spirit which even the enemies of the gospel could not quote against the gospel, warranted them to consider themselves as heirs of eternal life. They did not, therefore, allow it to depend on the candour and conscience of others, whether this conclusion should be drawn or not. It was too important to be left to public caprice ; and, therefore, they drew it themselves. "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth." "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." This was speaking *cut*, on the subject of Christian hope ! Yes ; and yet it was saying no more than God had warranted. It is only what all may and ought to avow, who are relying on Christ for a holy salvation.

Now such a testimony, when not contradicted by the character of the witness, could not fail to commend the gospel. It would bring our relations and friends to the point. "Here," they must confess, "is *present* happiness,

as well as a strong probability of eternal happiness." Whereas, if they see us in almost as much doubt of our future safety, as they are of their own, they will question the use of *faith*, even if they do not question the use of good works.

Silence is, however, so common on this subject, and so characteristic of those who are most warranted to speak out, that it seems almost a virtue. We are so accustomed to entire silence, or to vague expressions, about personal expectations of heaven, that we should be almost *startled* to hear even the best of our pious friends, who are neither old nor infirm, avow their pleasure or hope. There must be very eminent piety, indeed, in the person to whom we could listen, with common patience, whilst he was speaking of his own crown or mansion of glory. Free and firm statements of this kind, we should be ready to set down as ominous symptoms of a speedy death, whatever were the health, or the age, or the holiness of the person who made them. And, in our own case, and that of Christians in general, we should consider it a want both of humility and prudence, to utter our hopes of heaven, even when they are strongest. We act thus towards our nearest friends; and in the case of the world, we are induced to say, that it would be casting "pearls before swine," to tell worldly men that we had found a title to heaven in the atonement of Christ. We almost give our "consent," that he who says so to others, before he is upon his death-bed, should be laughed at by the world, and suspected by the church.

This is the current feeling on the subject now. It was not so in the olden time. Then, Christians comforted one another under their trials, with the comfortable words, "we shall meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord." And are we *wiser* or *humbler* than the first believers? Were they presumptuous or impudent when they said, in the presence of the world, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope,

by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Is this language, or our silence, most in harmony with the spirit of the gospel? Was their triumph, or is our timidity, the best way of commending the gospel? One thing is certain—their rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and in the hope of eternal life, had a mighty influence, both in explaining and endearing the gospel to their friends and neighbours. Even their persecutors often dropped the sword, the axe, and the torch of martyrdom, overcome by the holy triumphs of the martyrs, and suffered with the victims they came to destroy.

But these were extraordinary times! True. The gospel is, however, the same in our "day" that it was in their "yesterday." And, whatever higher degree of glory we are willing to concede to the martyrs and confessors, we expect the same heaven. And shall we be ashamed to say so? Can our silence do good to ourselves, or to any one else? It will certainly never be an effectual check to Antinomian boasting. If that "unclean spirit" is ever cast out of the churches, it must be by the prevalence of a hope as full of immortality as of good fruits. For, until believers acquire and acknowledge as much comfort from the *revealed* will of God, as Antinomianism pretends to furnish from the *secret* purposes of God, the boasting will go on. The silence of believers, has, in fact, done much to create and keep up the loquacity of that system. Its high pretensions are just the opposite extreme of our silent and low hopes. Antinomians say too much, and we say too little; and thus we furnish them, however unintentionally, with plausible arguments against our principles.

This is not a light matter. We are held up as being legalists, and unbelievers, and traitors to the doctrines of grace. Now, any one can despise this charge; or, by argument, refute it. It has often been triumphantly refuted and retorted. But, still it is kept up. And, O say not, "What does it signify?" nor, "Who cares what Antinomians

*think or say?"* It does signify and we ought to care ; for the charge is founded, chiefly, upon our acknowledgments of doubt, and suspense, and want of comfort in religion ; and it is not answered when we say, that our low hopes prove nothing against our principles. This is, indeed, true ; but it is equally true, that our low hopes, and frequent lack of comfort, prove that we, in some way or degree, *misapprehend* the gospel. For, as Christ expressly and repeatedly declares, that whosoever believeth on him "*hath everlasting life, and shall never perish ;*" and, as we profess to believe on him, it is not altogether unfair nor unnatural, if those who see little and hear less of our hope of salvation, should both think and say that *unbelief* lies at the bottom of our silence and suspense. Indeed, they are right when they say so. They are far wrong when they call us *unbelievers* ; but not very far from the truth when they charge us with unbelief. We certainly do not believe that we "have eternal life," when we indulge or express the fear of perishing. That hope, and this fear, are incompatible. The fear is not, indeed, incompatible with *faith*, but it is so with hope. John recognised, as true believers, those who did not know, for a time, that they had eternal life ; and wrote to them that they "*might know*" that they had it. (1 John v. 13.) But he also told them, that "He that feareth is not made perfect in love ; for perfect love casteth out (tormenting) fear.

For our own sake, therefore, and for the sake of others, and "for the truth's sake," we are solemnly bound to cherish such a hope of eternal life, as shall endear the gospel to ourselves, and commend it to others. But this we never can do, if eternal life itself is not made the subject of deliberate and devotional contemplation. Hasty, and partial, and occasional glances at heaven, will not call forth strong faith, nor bring into our minds such "forms of glory" as can delight the soul in the day of adversity, or sanctify it in the day of prosperity. Eternal things are *unseen* things, and therefore not to be apprehended or appreciated at once.

Like the invisible God, they require us to "acquaint" ourselves with them. Now, as it is not the vague notion of God which is afloat in the world that awes or animates our minds; but his revealed character as God in Christ, and that, viewed in all its attributes, and often thought of; so it is not the vague and meager notion of heaven as a mere place of safety from hell, that can either set our affections on things above, or sooth us amidst the vicissitudes of things on the earth. We must meditate on the character of eternity, as we have on the character of God—deeply, frequently, voluntarily, if we would be influenced by it. In like manner, whatever love we have to an unseen Saviour was not derived, and is not sustained, from the superficial ideas of him which are afloat in the world; but from views of his person and work, drawn from the divine testimony, compared with the opinions of the apostles and prophets, harmonized with the songs of angels and glorified spirits, and often tried upon the fears of our heart and the wounds of our spirit. Thus, whatever just and influential estimate we have formed of the divine favour, it has been drawn from scriptural views of the divine character. We set ourselves to think over the character of God and the Lamb, until it awake some hope, and even some love, in our minds. And now, we can set our knowledge of God and the Lamb against many of our fears and trials, with some success. Our convictions of the divine *wisdom* enable us to wait with some patience for "the end of the Lord" in our trials. And our convictions of the divine *faithfulness*, keep the promises precious in our estimation, even whilst they are not much fulfilled in our experience.

Here, then, there is some happy accordance between the influence which the invisible God and Saviour have over us, and that influence which they had over the first believers. We are, in some measure, of "one spirit" with them, in bringing the perfections of God and the blood of the Lamb to bear upon our hopes and fears. Why, then, are we so unlike them, in reckoning that the sufferings of the present

time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us! It is needless to ask, why do we not "desire to depart and be with Christ;" nor, why do we not "groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven?" These questions would be evaded. But let us not evade the inquiry. Why have eternal things such a small place in our thoughts and conversation, compared to the "large room" they had in the hearts of the primitive Christians? We not only can make but little practical use of the prospects of heaven, but we are ashamed to speak, and often afraid to think of them. We might really dislike heaven, so little do we say about it; or be indifferent to it, so seldom do we set ourselves to contemplate it.

It is not, therefore, at all wonderful, however lamentable it may be, that we turn more to the doctrine of a *present* Providence for relief in the day of trouble, than to the doctrine of *future* glory. We have studied the former more than the latter. Had Providence engaged our attention as seldom and sprightly as eternity has done, it would have had even less place in our minds, and less influence on our character, than eternity has. What, then, would be the happy effect of giving, for a time, such "good heed" to the whole doctrine of immortality, as we have done to the doctrines of grace and Providence? The revelation of glory will not divert us from the revelation of grace. The time required in order to our being well informed concerning the crown, will not render us ill affected towards the cross. A fair and full view of heaven will not cut any of the natural links of life, nor alienate the heart from any of the duties of life or godliness. These may be eclipsed for a moment by the superior claims of eternity; but, as in the eclipses of the sun and moon, the shadows will soon pass off, and leave all proper things in their proper place and power. There is no danger of so realizing the things which are unseen and eternal, as to forget the things which are seen and temporal. The danger is, lest the latter displace the former.

## No. II.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF REALIZING ETERNITY.

WHILST there is nothing we more readily admit than the grandeur and solemnity of eternity, there is, perhaps, nothing we are more reluctant to dwell on. We have, indeed, no objection to hear, occasionally, a well-timed and solemn-toned appeal to the awful realities of eternity; nor do we dislike those occasional gleams of it which flash upon our spirit when we are communing with God in prayer. We are rather pleased, than otherwise, to feel now and then that we are not insensible to the glories of heaven and the terrors of hell, nor altogether uninfluenced by them. Indeed, we should question both the soundness and the sincerity of our faith, if it never realized "the things which are unseen and eternal," except when it was forced to do so by ministerial and providential appeals. Thus the subject has upon its side our understanding entirely, and our conscience too in no small degree.

This is; so far, well. It does not, however, disprove the assertion, that we are reluctant to cultivate realizing views of eternity. Deliberate efforts to acquire and keep up a solemn sense of eternal things are very rare: and not at all equal, in kind or degree, to the efforts we make in order to maintain a becoming sense of the evil of sin and the necessity of holiness. We are even afraid of an abiding impression of eternity; and suspect, if not believe, that it would throw a gloom over life, and turn seriousness into sadness. This lurking suspicion is not dislodged, nor much shaken, even when we remember that it is on the *bright* side of the pillar of eternity we are invited to dwell. We cannot forget that it has a *dark* side too, which may turn upon us oftener than we should like. And we see, with some clearness, that even on its bright side, we should be kept more

familiar with death than we wish to be at present. We can hardly conceive it possible to think much of eternity, without thinking too much about death; they are so closely associated in our minds. The latter appears to us the dark shadow of the former, even when the former is brightest.

Thus there is against the habit of looking daily to eternal things all the natural and acquired force of our love of life, and of our fear of death. The claims of immortality present themselves to us, pointing to the grave, and muttering our mortality. We believe that Jesus Christ brought immortality to light; but, somehow, we *feel* that it is the king of terrors who holds up the prospect to us. Our "last enemy," rather than our best friend, is most seen, in connexion with our glimpses of the invisible world.

There are also causes of reluctance, which are more discreditable to us. We see, at a glance, that an habitual sense of eternity would impose and compel more self-denial, or self-control, or self-examination, than we altogether like. We feel, instinctively, that certain tempers and tendencies, if not some habits also, would require great and immediate improvements, if they were confronted from day to day with the claims of Heaven. Every aspect of immortality is so full of solemn protests against all compromises with the flesh and the world, that even the most exemplary cannot but see clearly, and feel deeply, that they are not altogether that "manner of persons" which, as heirs of immortality, they ought to be.

These are not imaginary nor slight causes of that shrinking from the realization of eternity which is so common. We are eagle-eyed in discerning how a habit of realizing would bring all our habits, public, domestic, and secret, under solemn revision and stricter discipline; and, thus, whatever is bad in our nature and character, as well as all that is weak in them, is averse to the duty, because it involves so many other duties.

It is this, much more than the difficulty of forming clear views of invisible realities, that prevents us from looking

often to the things which are unseen and eternal. There are, indeed, mental hinderances, but they are neither so many nor so great as the *moral* hindrances. This is self-evident from the single fact, that we understand enough of the nature both of heaven and hell to make and keep us intent upon reaching the former and escaping the latter. Our knowledge of them is not so dim nor indefinite, as to prevent us from prizing the great salvation. Were we, therefore, as intent upon present deliverance from all wrong habits and tempers, as upon future escape from the wrath to come, we should find our knowledge quite as sufficient to induce greater holiness, as it is to endear the cross. It looks ill, therefore, when we, who never complain or pretend, that our views of eternity are either too few or feeble to endear the atonement, pretend that we know too little of it to live under its direct influence. This does not tell well. That which binds us to the cross, notwithstanding all its mysteries and all its odium, could not fail, if equally applied to universal holiness, to bind us to it also. Besides, (and let the fact prevent for ever, in our case, all attempts to shelter aversion under the wing of ignorance,) we hope to die in triumph or tranquillity, upon the faith of what we know of heaven, both as a state and as a place. We are sure, and must confess, that if we can only *enjoy* then, all that we can anticipate and understand now, we shall not be strangers to comfort or composure when we come to exchange worlds. Away, then, with the pitiful pretence that our ideas of future glory are too indefinite to have an habitual influence upon our present character and spirit: they are, by our own acknowledgment, distinct enough, and numerous enough, to "turn the shadow of death into the morning," even when heart and flesh are failing. Surely, therefore, they are adequate, if honestly applied, to make all sin appear "exceeding sinful," and all holiness "altogether lovely."

Nothing is more unfounded (as will hereafter be shown) than the pretence that we know what heaven *is not*, rather than what *it is*. This is a poor compliment to Him, who

“brought life and immortality to light, (illuminated them,) by the gospel.” It is an equally mean and meager commentary on this sublime fact, to say, that the future state is chiefly revealed to us by negatives. Both heaven and hell are revealed in the same way, and almost to the same extent, as the perfections of God, or the person and work of the Saviour. Negatives are as much used in explaining their character, as in depicting the invisible world, and are, in general, as useful, on both subjects, as the most positive information. We might, therefore, just as well say, that we do not know enough of God or the Lamb to think much about them, as say that we know too little of eternal things to think much about them. We do not, indeed, know all the truth concerning either, nor comprehend all that is revealed; but both are alike adapted to our capacity, and equally distinct. Accordingly, the claims of heaven upon our attention and affections, are as fully stated as the claims of the law or the gospel and, what is more, the claims of God and the Lamb are chiefly enforced by the glories and terrors of eternity: facts which demonstrate that there is no lack of light, whatever lack of *looking* there may be.

It is not much wiser to refer to the *weakness* of our minds, when the duty of looking to the things which are unseen and eternal, is enforced upon us. It is, indeed, very plausible, and seems very humble, to ask, “What can we make of such a subject as eternity? We are lost the moment we attempt to realize it! Even in its barest form—that of endless duration—it defies all our calculations. We are no nearer to the comprehension of it, when we think of countless myriads of millions of ages, than when we think of countless moments. Like infinity, it has its centre everywhere; but its circumference nowhere. What then is the use of trying to comprehend the incomprehensible?”

All this, however, is equally true of God and the Lamb; but we never ask, what is the use of trying to realize their incomprehensible glories. We feel it to be both our duty and interest, to try what can be made of them, by meditation

and prayer. We confess and rejoice, that the divine character sometimes opens on the mind, in such light and loveliness, such power and glory, that we are amply repaid for all the time, and thought, and prayer, which led to these discoveries. We know, that still brighter discoveries would be the certain reward of a more devotional spirit. We have told our souls, on retiring from some secret interviews with God, that they were for ever without excuse, if ever they doubted the fact or the felicity of communion with God, or ever grudged the time required for it. Even these passing hints awaken recollections of times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, which compel us to exclaim, "O, that it were with me as in months past, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacles, and his candle shined on my head." Let, therefore, these experimental facts answer the question—what is the use of trying to comprehend the incomprehensible?

Besides, what is it, in eternal glory, that is so very incomprehensible? We ourselves have not spent so very much time or thought upon the subject, as warrants us to pronounce it inconceivable; and the books written upon it, are neither so many nor so meager as to prove that little can be made of it. Baxter's *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, and especially his *Dying Thoughts*, are not failures. Drexelius was too ignorant of the gospel to succeed; and Cayley too quaint; and Welwood too fanciful. Besides, like the present work, all these books are too small to determine the real capabilities of the subject. They only prove, when compared with our standard works on other lofty topics, how little has ever been attempted on this one, is it not evident, that if we had nothing more elaborate and profound on the subject of the divine character and government; of the glory and grace of the atonement; of the nature and effects of divine influence; there would be less interest taken in these cardinal points than there now is? Can any thoughtful man doubt, that, if Baxter's time and thought had been equally divided between eternity and controversy;

Owen's, between it and doctrine ; Howe's, between it and discussion ; Doddridge's, between it and experience ; Jeremy Taylor's, between it and casuistry ; we should have had works on Eternity, as valuable and sublime as the other master-pieces of these master-spirits ? They would, of course, have all failed to define everlasting duration, and to specify the precise character of the "fulness" of heavenly engagements or enjoyments. What then ? A *definition* of eternity would not be of much use, if we had one ; and, therefore, the impossibility of grasping the idea of never-ending duration, is a poor apology for not trying to realize eternal things. The mental effort of measuring "everlasting" is not the exercise we are called to engage in ; nor is it one that could lead to any spiritual result, even if we were qualified to make that effort.

In like manner, the usual objections founded upon the general character of invisible things, are more plausible than weighty. For, what if we cannot *map* out the landscape of heaven ? We know that it is "Emmanuel's land," our "Father's house," the temple and the throne of "God and the Lamb." There is surely enough in all this both to instruct and delight, however little we can make of its sea of glass or its river of life. What if we ought not to attach material ideas to its crowns, or palms, or harps ? They are tokens of divine favour, and of the joy that springs from that favour ; and these are ideas equally simple and sublime. What if we can form no idea of the precise *order* in which the "general assembly" are arranged around the throne ? They are around the throne where Deity reigns in unveiled glory !—a fact so distinct and transporting, that the mind which will dwell on it for a moment, will feel incapable of giving a thought to the childish question of local arrangements. The armies of heaven are in the immediate presence of "*the God of order.*" That is enough. What, also, if we can form no idea of the precise way in which angels and the redeemed interchange their knowledge, and reciprocate their enjoyments, nor of the way in which God

and the Lamb communicate their will and feelings to both? There is communion between saints and angels, and between the Godhead and both. And, as it must be in a way *worthy* of the majesty of the divine nature and character, and becoming the intelligence of perfect spirits, questions about speech or language are really unworthy of such a subject. For, could we answer them, the knowledge of the forms and mediums of mental communication, could add little to the grandeur of the fact, that there is communion with God and with each other. What, also, if we can neither tell nor conceive, whether all things in heaven and throughout the universe will remain for ever, exactly as they will subsist at the consummation of time; or whether the cycles of eternity will witness the creation of new worlds, and new orders of beings, and the establishment amongst them of new systems of moral probation? We know what is better—that God will “*rest in his love*” to all the redeemed. No event will ever occur to alienate his heart, or hide his face, or divert his attention from them. Whatever new creations may arise in the universe, they will not displace the church from her rank in his esteem. Whatever order of angels or worlds may outstrip the rest in the career of improvement, they will never eclipse her; yea, whatever possible modification of moral government may be introduced into any possible creation, the *mediatorial*, under which the church of Christ was performed and perfected, will remain eternally the glory of the divine administration. “We shall be for ever with the Lord,” whatever other beings may be brought into existence; and for ever *nearest* to him, whatever new relations he may sustain to new worlds. He will die no more, he lives for ever, and, therefore, they must be for ever dearest to him, for whom he shed his blood.

There may be no events of that kind to diversify the ages and bliss of eternity. The supposition of them is not, however, rash nor improbable. And one thing is certain, if variety ever be wanted in order to perpetuate or promote

the happiness of heaven, there is space enough in infinity for all the worlds and systems which omnipotence can create, should every age of eternity be marked by a new creation as vast as the old.

But to close this series of questions—what if we cannot now realize either the precise kind or degree of our *knowledge* in heaven. We are sure that it will be satisfactory, both in kind and degree. It will impart and prolong “fulness of joy;”—and what more could we wish? We naturally advert, when we think of heavenly knowledge, to the mystery of the divine essence; and wonder whether we shall understand the unity of the Trinity. Few, perhaps, have felt more curiosity on this point than myself. I have so often dwelt upon this question, that I am actually ashamed of the degree in which it has occupied my attention. For, however desirable or pleasing it might be to understand this mystery, it is self-evident, when we pause to reflect, that even the perfect knowledge of it could not add much to our enjoyment. It would rather gratify our curiosity than increase our happiness. Indeed, its moral bearings upon present or future bliss are any thing but obvious. Not that I am indifferent to such knowledge, nor underrate it; but when I ask myself, how it would profit me, I must say that I cannot answer the question. I cannot but see, that even if I understood all mysteries, and *this* one most, I should still have to find my happiness in the *character* of God. The comprehension of his essence, however full and clear, could not answer the same moral purposes as the comprehension of his love, his wisdom, or his faithfulness. And as there is no doubt but these will be known and enjoyed in perfection, I must say to myself and to others, that we should sustain no spiritual loss were this mystery to be as eternal as it is now entire.

I do not, however, think that it will be so. The assurance that “we shall know, even as we are known,” pledges, if not open vision on the subject, such a degree of light as shall render the union of Father, Son, and Spirit, in the

one Godhead, as obvious as the union of soul, body, and spirit in our own one person. But as it will not be from knowing the points where the latter blend, nor the nexus of their unity, but from the intellectual and moral powers thus produced and perfected; so, whatever be the light thrown upon the unity of the Trinity, our chief confidence and delight in the Godhead must spring from its moral perfections, and not from its physical properties. In a word—we shall know all that finite intellect can enjoy or bear; and, surely, there is range enough in that wide and warm circle of light, to render the anticipation of the perfect day of eternity equally pleasing and profitable.

Thus there is really less difficulty in conceiving of invisible things, than appears at first sight. The current objections against trying to realize them are not so formidable as they are plausible. They are, in fact, rather the suggestions of *sloth*, than the convictions of reason; and far less derived from baffled effort to comprehend, than from reluctance to meditate.

I must now say distinctly, that I have a very mean opinion of all the ordinary excuses, put forward to palliate or explain the slight attention given to eternal things. I feel thus, especially, in reference to the wrath to come. When that is dwindled into a question about the *materiality* of everlasting burnings, both the head and the heart do themselves little credit. For, whatever unquenchable fire, or the deathless worm, may literally mean, they can mean nothing good—nothing easy—nothing temporary. Besides, to a mind rightly exercised and disposed, there is surely more than enough to awe it, and to fix its awe, in the single fact, that hell is “the wrath of God and the Lamb.” There can be no great soundness of judgment nor justness of feeling, where the impression of this solemn fact is defeated or weakened by curiosity. It does, therefore, appear to me one of the deceits of the human heart, if not one of the wiles of Satan, when our thoughts entangle themselves with the minute details of future misery, and thus escape from

the awful and obvious truth, that it is "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Yes; hell is this, whatever else it is, and whatever else it is not. Of what consequence then is the question, what else is hell, seeing it is *this*? O, did we estimate things according to their real or their relative importance, there is in this one view of the wrath to come, such definite and appalling terrors, that even a momentary glance at them, if given daily, could not fail to keep us fleeing from that wrath, and clinging with a death-grasp to the cross, as the only refuge from it.

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### No. III.

#### THE EXCUSES FOR NOT REALIZING ETERNITY.

HOWEVER natural it may be to prefer the prospect of immortality to the horrid idea of annihilation, it is certainly neither natural nor common to think often of immortality. It is not so attractive to us as annihilation is repulsive. We dislike the bare idea of coming to such an end as "the beasts which perish;" but we do not, proportionably, *love* the bright hope of being "as the angels of God in heaven." We do not turn to the latter with the promptness or spirit that we turn away from the former. Indeed, our reluctance to speak or think much of immortality is almost as great as our aversion to annihilation. This is a strange inconsistency! We loathe the extinction of our being, and yet shrink from dwelling on the eternity of it. This would be very inconsistent, even if the gospel did no more than proclaim redemption from the hell it reveals, without at all describing the heaven it promises. Mere escape from everlasting misery, to eternal life of any other kind, and in

any other place, would deserve more consideration than we usually give to our "Father's house." O, yes; were we never to see God as he is, nor the Lamb in his essential glory; never to see the throne nor the temple of Deity; never to behold one angel, nor to hear one anthem of the heaven of heavens; even the bare prospect of not being under the *wrath* of God and the Lamb, would be worth more attention and gratitude than we commonly pay to the full-orbed prospect of being for ever with the Lord, and with all who are the Lord's. Indeed, if the gospel were utterly silent on the subject of heaven, and said nothing else to commend or enforce its own claims, but just that, by believing and obeying it, we should escape the abode of "the devil and his angels," it would be glad tidings of great joy, and worthy of all acceptance. But this is not the gospel, nor yet like it. It opens heaven as fully as it uncovers hell. It says quite as much to render heaven alluring, as to render hell alarming.

It is not, therefore, owing to any defect in bliss or glory, nor to any deficiency of information concerning them, that we meditate so seldom and slightly upon them. The Old Testament saints, who knew far less of these eternal realities than we do, realized them far more than we do. This is no gratuitous compliment to their heavenly-mindedness. God, who cannot lie nor err, has expressly testified that their life and conversation "declare plainly" that they *desired* "a heavenly country," and "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Why is it, then, that, in general, we are reluctant to dwell upon the prospects of a glorious immortality; and that we require to plan, and watch, and pray, and resolve, before we can at all enter into the spirit of heavenly contemplation; and, that we do not always succeed, even when we make an effort to pass within the veil? It is very pitiful when this question is answered by the cold remark, "We know too little of heaven to think much about it. We rather know what it is not, than what it is. It is chiefly described

by *negatives*." Negatives! True; but they are glorious negatives. No night! no death! no sin! no suffering or sorrow! This is what heaven is not. And is all this too little to furnish matter for frequent and profound meditation? Sin cannot be a very oppressive burden to the mind that takes no pleasure in contemplating eternal freedom from the very *being*, as well as from the love and power of sin. Ignorance, and liability to mistake and err, cannot be very irksome to the mind that is not delighted with the prospect of seeing "face to face" all the things which we "now see through a glass darkly." Pain and death cannot be much felt or feared, nor the vicissitudes of life much reckoned on, where the prospect of "no more curse" has little or no attraction. It is, therefore, very pitiful, when the negatives of revelation are appealed to, as reasons for not looking much to the things which are unseen and eternal. Were any of the lowest of these negatives to become true of any place in this world, that place would soon be attractive and popular. The discovery of a country in which there was no pain, or no sickness, would be a theme of enthusiastic congratulation. Such a place would soon be crowded; and even those who stayed at home would be unable to forbear from thinking of it, although it were described only by negatives. Such a negative as "no suffering," would be held to be a positive good, and be hailed with general gratitude. And, as heaven is the entire and eternal *negation* of all evil, natural and moral, they evince little mind, and less conscience, who excuse their inattention to it by the pretence, that "we know what it is not, rather than what it is."

It is also common to put forward a better excuse in a worse form; because an unscriptural form. How often are both speaking and thinking, abruptly broken off, by quoting the words of Paul, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." This too is pitiful, whether it arise from ignorance or inattention; for

Paul immediately adds, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. This the apostle repeats with triumph: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we *might know the things which are freely given us of God*; which things also we speak." So far, therefore, is the apostolic argument from being an apology for not attempting to realize heaven, that it is, in fact and intention, a strong reason for looking much and often to the joy set before us. Well might BAXTER say: "Think on the joys above as boldly as Scripture hath expressed them. To conceive of glory, only as above our conception, will beget little love; or, as above our love, will produce little joy." Baxter, indeed, knew well, and Paul knew perfectly, that "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" surpass all knowledge and comprehension: but they knew, also, that God had revealed these things as freely and fully as they were utterable by words, or could be made intelligible by images; which is just as far as a *revelation* of them could go; and, therefore, these holy men found in this, inspiring reasons for frequent and rapturous contemplation of the saints' everlasting rest.

This case is similar to that of the love of Christ. It "passeth knowledge" in its breadth and length, its depth and height; but that is not held to be a valid reason for not trying to "comprehend" it. Accordingly, when we do try, we do comprehend enough of its "breadth," to see *room* for ourselves; enough of its "length," to see *residence* for ourselves; enough of its "depth," to see *support* for ourselves; enough of its "height," to see *security* for ourselves. Or, if at any time, or even often, we fail to see all this in the dimensions and duration of the love of Christ, we feel that the failure is owing to our own blindness or unbelief, and not to any defect in His love. Besides, its incomprehensibility is felt to be a part of its glory. We understand and enjoy it most when we are constrained to say, "It passeth knowledge!" When Paul uttered this exclamation,

and its emphatic accompaniments, he saw more of the wonders of redeeming love than he had ever seen before. His mind was *out* amongst its immeasurable glories, as NEWTON'S was abroad in the universe, when he said it was unsearchable. This, in Newton's lips, was not the language of ignorance, nor of disappointment. He saw the distant and dazzling points at which the universe *became* unsearchable; and never knew nor enjoyed so much, as when he thus felt, through all his soul, that it "passeth knowledge." In like manner, Paul saw the *point* of breadth, the *point* of length, the *point* of depth, the *point* of height, at which the love of Christ, like the spaces of infinity, surpasseth comprehension.

So it is with the glories of heaven. Enough may be discovered, by devotional meditation, to fill the heart with a "joy full of glory;" and that joy will *overflow* whenever it is really "unspeakable." There is, therefore, no such lack or indefiniteness of information, as would excuse inattention, or as should discourage effort. Behold, in Revelation, "a ladder set up on earth," and the top thereof reacheth "to heaven;" and we, though not angels, may ascend and descend on it with perfect safety and daily advantage. It was not on this ladder that the Mystics ascended.

Is it, then, because we deem it *unnecessary* to our safety or comfort, that we set apart so little time for heavenly meditation? Are we influenced in this by the conduct of others; and, because so few seem heavenly-minded, until they are dying, do we think it enough to be neighbour-like? Do we ever, to avoid the trouble of retiring to meditate on heaven, try to prove that it is not necessary unto salvation to be heavenly-minded? Are we rather pleased with, than ashamed of, the bald logic which could make it quite plausible, that a man may get to heaven at last, without thinking much about it by the way? Are we at all inclined to play off any of the doctrines of grace against the necessity of setting our affections on "things above?"

These questions are not so numerous or varied, as the

ways in which the human heart tries to evade the claims of God and eternity upon its affections: It can play both dexterous and desperate games of hazard, when it is unwilling to yield to divine authority. Some persuade themselves that there is no hazard even in allowing an immoral habit of life to stand out against the law of God. Now, this *we* durst not allow in ourselves. This we brand with the deserved and disgraceful name of Antinomianism; the mark of the modern "beast and false prophet," whether blazoned on the "forehead," or hid in the "hand." There are, however, "lusts of the mind," as well as lusts of the flesh; and the desire to reserve the great bulk of our spare time for thinking and speaking of earthly things, is one of these mental lusts. The desire to have things right between God and the conscience, without the trouble of *keeping* them right, is another. Impatience to quit the closet is a third. Drawing in, or checking, those lines of thought which lead direct to eternity, is a fourth. Now, although none of these lusts of the mind amount to Antinomianism, there is enough of sin in them to make a conscientious man afraid and ashamed of them. We, therefore, ought not to parley with the mean questions, how little heavenly meditation is compatible with not risking heaven; or, how much may we "mind earthly things," without missing eternal things at last? These are calculations which the Searcher of hearts must despise, as dishonourable to Himself, and as discreditable to those who are bound to *please* Him. For how can we please Him, if we take little or no pleasure in the eternal weight of glory, which he has prepared for, and revealed to, them that love him?

Consider, we profess to have "like precious faith" with them who first loved God, Now, they could say, "Our conversation is in heaven." Their apostolic teachers could say of them, "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods; knowing, in yourselves, that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring inheritance." Now, as we allow, and even try to make our faith go all the length that theirs went, in re-

lying on the Saviour, and in depending on the Holy Spirit, and in following practical holiness, why not allow and employ it to be "the substance of things hoped, and the evidence of things not seen?" Hear how God appeals to us on behalf of this duty: "If ye be then risen with Christ, seek those things which are from above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." This spiritual command is as authoritative as the moral command annexed to it—"Mortify your members which are upon the earth," (Col. i. 1-5.) Now, this moral command, so far as it regards the lusts of the flesh, we revere and obey. It is written upon our hearts as with the pen of a diamond. We deprecate and loathe any sophistry that would relax its authority over us, or soften the aspect of incontinence. This is as it should be; but why should the spiritual command be less heeded, or the neglect of it be less feared? It rests upon the same high authority, and is equally explicit. Its *sanction*, also, although it do not sound so awfully, is not less solemn than that of the former. The Saviour enforces heavenly-mindedness thus: "for where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also:" a consideration not less awful, when duly weighed, than the "wrath" threatened against the unclean; for if the "heart" be set on earthly things, the issue will be fatal to the soul.

It is easy to say, and to prove by words, that there is no comparison between sensuality and earthly-mindedness, in point of guilt. This is quite true, in more senses than one. It is, however, equally true, that there is much comparison between them in point of *tendency*. Accordingly, worldliness ruins quite as many as profligacy, if not more. It is equally powerful, and more plausible, in diverting the mind from God. It leaves as little room or relish in the heart for secret devotion, as vice can do. The sensualist is afraid to be *alone* with God; and the worldling grudges the time and dislikes the duty. In a word; as it is expressly declared that the sensual have not "the Spirit," so it is, that

“if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

It is not intended by these remarks to confound even a low degree of heavenly-mindedness, with *this* love of the world. The former may coexist with both the love and the fear of God for a time. A renewed mind is not a heavenly mind at once, nor always soon; but whilst this is readily granted, it is not less true, that a renewed mind can only *prove* its renewal to itself, by trying to set its affections on things above, as soon as the necessity of doing so is proved to be imperative; for to give ourselves full credit for being “born of God,” whilst conscious of a wilful outstand against this divine command, would be both imprudent and presumptuous. Something must be, and *will* be done, in this matter, by an honest convert, that he may have a good conscience towards God in heavenly things, as well as towards man in earthly things. Much will not be done, however, until he is as fully persuaded of the *advantage*, as of the necessity of heavenly-mindedness; for where it is to begin, after we have gone on pretty well for years without it, it is not easy to see the use or the benefit of it. Indeed, at first sight, there seems more advantage to be derived from cultivating the *practical* virtues more carefully, than from thinking often about heaven. And there is much weight in the question—Is not practical godliness the best preparation for heaven? The man who denies or doubts this, does not understand the design of the gospel. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation,” bringeth it, “teaching us, that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” But this is not all that it teaches us: all this is to be done, Paul says, “*looking* for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” (Titus ii. 13.) Looking heavenward is, therefore, as much one of the lessons which grace teacheth, as looking well to our moral conduct, is another; and a *habit* of both is equally taught in the gospel. Accordingly, they will be found,

on due examination, to be mutually necessary and useful to each other. Indeed, there can be no heavenly-mindedness, where there is little practical godliness. The man who is not both sober and honest, is unable to realize eternal things, so as to derive any enjoyment from them. There is a flaming sword between him, and "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." It is quite unnecessary to caution him against devoting too much of his time or thought to the contemplation of future glory. His thoughts run in the opposite direction, when they are forced in amongst invisible realities.

On the other hand, however, it is equally true, that, without "looking for the blessed hope" of eternal life, there will be no eminent godliness. There may, indeed, be honesty, and sobriety, and benevolence, maintained, without much distinct reference to heaven; because these duties bring a daily reward, by increasing the comfortableness of the comforts of life. There are, however, duties, and those of equal importance too, which cannot be well discharged without a considerable degree of heavenly-mindedness, because their rewards are remote. The *religious* education of a family is one of these duties. Parents, who are content to let recollections of eternity come and go as may happen, and who take no pains to keep the light of eternity upon their domestic responsibilities, will neither do nor care much for the spiritual welfare of their children; but will also content themselves with the negative virtue of not setting a bad example before their offspring, and with the *cheap* discipline of an angry reproof, or a hasty punishment. In such families, also, nothing will be done to make *servants* wise unto salvation, except allowing or requiring them to attend public worship once on the Lord's day. In like manner, where there is no habitual sense of unseen realities kept up, there will be no habitual effort to glorify God, by trying to do good to the souls of the poor and the perishing. Relief may be *sent* to the poor, and visiting societies supported for the spiritual benefit of the sick; but *personal* ex-

ertions to win souls will not be made, by any one whose personal piety has but little daily reference to eternity.

Nor are these the only duties which cannot be well discharged without some heavenly-mindedness. The Scriptures will not be much, nor very devotionally, searched, if we lose sight of the "eternal life" which they reveal. Secret prayer will not be very solemn nor constant, if we confine our attention to our *immediate* spiritual wants; for whatever truth there may be in the religious proverb, (and there is much,) that "dying grace is for a dying hour," it is equally true, that if grace to live well is not sought with an express reference to dying well, it will not be earnestly nor often sought. He will pray most in secret, and with most pleasure, whose closet is, as it were, a little *nook* of the heaven of heavens, partitioned off for communion with God, and whose times of retirement are regarded as portions of eternity. And there is special need, that the family altar should actually lean on the eternal throne; there is such danger of becoming formal and dull in domestic worship!

The advantages of heavenly-mindedness are not, however, confined to the duties of godliness: they extend also to religious *enjoyments*. Now, a "good hope through grace," is an enjoyment which we prize highly, and pray much for; because we find that we cannot go on well without it. We feel with Paul, that hope is the very "anchor of the soul." We call it emphatically, "*our sheet anchor*;" nor is there any impropriety in thus strengthening our sense of its importance, by the best form of its consecrated image. It would, however, be better to familiarize ourselves with the scriptural use of this fine image. Now, Paul says, that the anchor of hope "*entereth into THAT within the veil*; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." "That within the veil," is evidently heaven. It is, therefore, when hope (like an anchor passing through the veil of the waters until it lay hold upon the channels of the waters) passes into heaven, that it becomes an anchor of the soul, "sure and steadfast," and thus furnishes "strong

consolation." (Heb. vi. 19, 20.) If, therefore, we would enjoy or maintain a good hope through grace, we must make it to enter within the veil, not only when our souls are tempest-tossed, but also when there is a "great calm." Indeed, we shall not be able to use it as an anchor, in the storm, if we do not use it in the calm. Accordingly, those who use it rather as *ballast* to their character, than as an anchor of the soul, find, in the hour of temptation and trial, that they cannot cast it within the veil. They try; but it will not take hold of "THAT" which is within. Their hope drags, like an anchor on bad moorings. Not, indeed, that using it as ballast to the character, is the cause of this. Hope should, yea, must, be employed to steady the life, as well as to cheer the heart. It will, however, be unable to enter within the veil, whilst all without the veil is dark and threatening, if it do not accustom itself to enter when all without is tranquil. Our souls must send hope heavenward, even when they *least* need the consolation, if they would stand prepared to enjoy that consolation when they *most* need it.

The spirit, although not the form, of these hints, is equally applicable to the enjoyment of *peace* of conscience. This, also, is very dear, and justly so, to all true believers; and, like every other spiritual joy, it has both its source and centre in the CROSS of Christ. But whilst it was the blood of Christ that made peace, and whilst it is faith in that blood which brings peace into the conscience, it is heaven which tests *our* peace in believing, and shows "what sort it is:" for if it will not bear to be confronted with heaven, it is not such a peace as the atonement is calculated to afford; and, therefore, not such as should satisfy us. Nothing, however, is farther from my intention, in these remarks, than to insinuate that there is *no* faith in the atonement, when there is no assurance of eternal life, or whilst heaven is not directly contemplated. There is much evidence of true faith, when a conscience, once burdened with guilt, and agitated with fear, is so tranquillized by

scriptural views of the cross, that the believer is both able and willing to engage in all the ordinary duties of life with composure and determination. This is as truly "the work of faith," and as properly so, as any effort to set our affections on things above: for we belong to time as well as to eternity; to this world, as well as to that which is to come; and are, therefore, equally bound to discharge the duties of both. It would, therefore, be decidedly wrong to form a habit of so contemplating heaven, as if we were just about to leave the world. This is not what is wanted. It is, however, necessary, as we know not when we must leave the world, that our faith should often try how our peace will stand the test of a steady look at heaven. Let it, by all means, look at the duties of life and godliness; and observe well, how it is affected by them; and let all its holy influence upon them be set down as proof of its being "the peace of God," which springs from faith in Christ. It must not, however, be allowed to stop here. Our peace must be frequently confronted with heaven also, if we would have it to "keep our hearts and minds" truly happy. For, as there must be something wrong or defective in it, if thinking of eternity disturbs it; so our own consciousness of this disturbance must create a suspicion that we may have no peace, when we are *compelled* to think of eternity: for if the prospect agitate us, how must the reality overpower us on our death-bed? Whereas, by seeking from day to day, a peace which shall "reign unto eternal life," as well as sweeten our temporal life, we shall do best for both worlds.

It is now easy to see how heavenly-mindedness must maintain and promote *love* to the Saviour. We often lament the coldness and deadness of our hearts towards Him. There are few prayers that we utter so fervently, as that of WATTS:—

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,  
With all thy quickening powers;  
Come, shed abroad a Saviour's love,  
And that shall kindle ours!"

Well, the spirit we thus invoke, works by means. He quickens by *quickenings motives*; and one of them is, the hope of glory. Now, this he employs so much for kindling love to Christ, that one of his own titles is, "the earnest of the inheritance" in heaven. By trying, therefore, to set our affections on things above, we are taking the most natural way, and the most spiritual too, of setting them upon the Saviour himself. Indeed, it is impossible to love him as we ought, or even as we might, without contemplating frequently both the wrath to come, from which He delivers; and the glory to come, which He has prepared.

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#### No. IV.

##### NOMINAL FAITH, FROM NOT REALIZING ETERNITY.

WHAT ought believers, and especially ministers, to think of that *national faith* which Christianity has obtained in this country? Any zealot can despise it; and any theorist expose its defects. Both, however, would be startled, were the national faith transferred from Protestantism to Popery, or to Deism, or even to Socinianism. Such an apostacy would be appalling, even to those who brand popular faith, as absolute unbelief. They would be the first to proclaim its guilt, and to predict its punishment. National faith is not, therefore, a worthless nor a useless thing. Even nominal Christianity is infinitely preferable to real infidelity. The latter would throw back the moral character of the country, and render salvation impossible; whereas the former, with all its awful defects—and they are as enormous as numerous—maintains many virtues, and helps to keep the golden candlestick of the gospel in Britain.

Is there, then, no faith at all in this popular belief? However this may be, there is as much truth passed into

currency, as keeps popular feeling hostile to Popery and Socinianism. Public opinion is against the great heresies, both of ancient and modern times. Indeed, except in a few obscure places, it is impossible for any minister to speak more highly of the glory or the grace of the Saviour, than the public mind would bear. Neither the "Amen," nor the "Alleluia," of the people would be withheld from the loftiest form of his worship.

Such being the sober and familiar facts of the case, that man's orthodoxy ought not to be suspected, who ventures to doubt the wisdom of *despising* and *denouncing* national faith. He ought, at least, to obtain a fair hearing, even when he hazards the assertion, that *exposures* of its defects and fallacies are not the only nor the best means of removing them. It is as easy, as it is true, to tell nominal believers, that they do not understand nor love the gospel which they profess to believe; that they have no spiritual discernment of its glory, and no humbling sense of their need of its grace. 'This, alas, is the fact; but the question is, why is this the case? It is easy to say, because they do not seek to be taught by the Spirit of God. 'This, also, is only too true! But here, also, the question, "Why is this the case," is necessary. Why are the generality so insensible of their need of divine teaching, and so averse to pray for it? Here, again, it is as easy, as it is true, to say, that they love the world so much, and sin so well, that "the things of the Spirit are foolishness" to them. Still the question returns, why do they so love the world and sin? Now, when we say that such is human nature, whilst *unregenerate*, we ought to remember, that such was our nature, and that of all believers, before conversion. What, therefore, was the grand consideration which the eternal Spirit employed for changing our *nominal* belief of the gospel, into *cordial* faith? What gave that force to truth; and that effect to trials; and that power to conscience; and that aspect to sin; which arrested our unbelief, and decided our character? The Christian, who will examine this matter duly in his own case,

will find that it was the weight of eternity which turned the scale. And if he will pass from his own case, to that of the first Christians, he will find, in a more remarkable degree, that it was by motives drawn from all the heights and depths of eternity, that the Holy Spirit won faith to the cross.

Now, if this be the historical and experimental fact, is it not both self-evident and certain, that nominal belief must prevail, until eternity is brought to bear more fully and frequently on the public mind? Are we wiser than Christ and the Apostles, that we deal so much in exposures of defect and fallacy in nominal faith, and so little in manifestations of eternal things? Are we so ignorant of human nature, as to imagine that the way to set men right, is to prove that they are wrong? Unmasking and analyzing character, principle, and motives, formed, indeed, a special part of the Saviour's ministry. He never met the scribes or the Pharisees, without exposing both their hypocrisy and self-righteousness. But, whilst this is true, it is equally true that all this was done in direct connexion with eternity. Their hypocrisy was laid open and lashed, not chiefly by contrasting it with the *sincerity* of the pious, but by kindling upon it "the damnation of hell." Their boasting righteousness was weighed, and found wanting; but not in the scales of comparison only, nor in the scales of law chiefly, but in those of judgment and eternity. Every thing was brought to an eternal issue, and kept in the full blaze of heaven's glories, or of hell's flames. Thus the Saviour gave the scribes and Pharisees something more to do, than to mark how their spirit differed from that of the penitent and the humble; He made them notice and feel, how it differed from all that constitutes meetness for heaven, and how it breathed "the savour of death unto death."

This characteristic of the Saviour's ministry may be traced in all his sermons to all classes. Everlasting life, or everlasting misery, is always the great motive by which he enforces every duty; and the *only* motive by which he enforces faith. Indeed, it might have been with an express

reference to the mere *moral reasonings* of the present day, and as a standing protest against them, that he ran all his lessons into eternity. When he argues against a besetting sin, he spends no time in proving its baneful influence upon personal or domestic happiness; but appeals, at once, to the final result of indulgence, "everlasting fire." Matt. xviii. 8, 9. In like manner, when he enforces mutual forgiveness and forbearance on his disciples, no time is lost in shifting these duties through all the signs of the zodiac of propriety; but an unforgiving servant is placed at once in the hands of "the tormentors," and the disciples told, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." If it is only the calling of opprobrious names he approaches the sin without any circumlocution, and says, "Whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." If it is but *one* member of the body that requires to be mortified, he threatens the "whole body" with hell, unless that member be crucified. "This is not the manner of man, O Lord God!" It was, however, the Saviour's manner of enforcing faith and obedience; and the effect of it was—the prevention of *nominal* belief, or the speedy detection of nominal believers. Under the ministry of Christ, men had to believe for eternity, or not at all; for he kept all truth and duty for ever upon the battlements of heaven, or upon the brink of hell. So did his apostles. The first and the final appeals of both, on behalf of faith and repentance, were, invariably and directly, to "the powers of the world to come." The consequence was, as has been already stated, that nominal faith did not prevail then. I had no leader to rally under. There was no apostle of the Lamb afraid to mention hell

"To ears polite."

Those who said, "I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos," did not avow this preference, because of any difference of doctrine or spirit between these preachers, on the subject of

the wrath to come. Both, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuaded men," and wielded these terrors with equal frequency and fidelity. Neither of them was an "awful preacher," in the sense of being—unfeeling, or clamorous in proclaiming the wrath to come. They had weighed that wrath too deeply, and they believed it too firmly, to brawl or rave when they denounced or described it. They did, however, both describe and denounce it. It was not hushed up, nor hurried over, in their sermons. It was not, indeed, *dwelt* upon, nor unnecessarily dragged into their sermons; but, when it was brought unto them, it came as "the wrath of God and the Lamb;"—a solemn, settled, and eternal reality! Those who heard Paul say, "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man that doeth evil," durst not have said that Paul was in a *passion*. However any one shrunk or shuddered, no one could calm his fears by charging the apostle with heat or harshness, when he exclaimed, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." This, if even uttered in thunder, outspake, like the Sinai trumpet, all the thunder, and outshone all the lightning, of voice or visage, which could accompany it. It might be braved by the reckless, and disbelieved by the skeptical; but it could not be evaded nor evaporated, by those who trembled, by the stale pretence of undue warmth or savage ferocity. It is as much too solemn to be passion, as is the thunder of the heavens to be noise. This description of the coming of Christ, to punish "with everlasting destruction," must have been uttered almost as solemnly as if Paul, in the presence of it, had said, "Behold, he cometh."

Now, of this manner and spirit of preaching "eternal judgment," there is by far too little in the present day; and the prevalence of nominal faith is the proof and the effect of the deficiency. Men could not remain at "ease in Zion," in such numbers and so long, if the terrors of the

Lord were rightly used "to persuade men." They may be often and awfully employed to terrify men; and yet produce no effect, or only a bad effect. Harsh denunciations of wrath are just as likely to harden the conscience, as silence on the subject of hell is to lull conscience asleep. Accordingly, it is no uncommon thing to find hell least feared where it is most familiar. This is only what might be expected. The terrors of the Lord, if not used for persuasion, and in a persuasive spirit, will be resented or ridiculed. The gospel, however, can neither be preached nor believed without the use of them. It is not the "great salvation" that is proclaimed, when heaven only is opened and offered. That is, also, a salvation from hell; and, therefore, it is compromised and misrepresented, whenever the wrath to come is less exhibited than the glory to be revealed. It is even *defeated*, when that wrath is reluctantly, or hesitatingly, or but slightly hinted at; for any appearance of faltering or fearing, in the proclamation of it, hinders the belief of it; and thus prevents the belief of the gospel. For no man does or can believe the gospel, until he believe that he is in danger of perishing eternally. Now, although the frequent pressing home of that danger is not the best way of producing the belief of it, slight references to it are sure to prevent the fear of perishing; because their slightness is held to betray the same doubt or dislike, on the part of the speaker, as is felt by the hearers. They interpret the reluctance to touch the subject, and the haste to leave it, and the pain evinced while naming it, as signs of secret disbelief; or regard them as transcripts of their own suspicions and aversion. And, if they see that they are humoured, and almost countenanced in their dislike of the subject, by the way in which it is hurried over, they will soon justify that dislike.

O, what wisdom! what prudence! is requisite, in order to preach the gospel. Christ is a Saviour from eternal misery, or not a Saviour at all; and yet nothing is so disbelieved as that misery. The very *silence* which is maintain-

ed on the subject of hell, proves how much it is disbelieved. The loudness and violence with which infidels deny and deride hell, betray more secret dread of it, than the silence of others indicates faith in it. The generality are silent, because they secretly hope or wish it to be untrue. They could not keep their thoughts or their lips so habitually clear of the subject, if it were not deeply doubted. The very hypocrites in Zion could not be silent if they believed in "everlasting burnings."

How ought this prevalent unbelief to be treated, is a question of immense importance. It admits, however, of a very simple answer, if Scripture, and not vain philosophy, be consulted. "The wrath to come" must be *asserted* in the pulpit as it is in the Bible—explicitly, solemnly, and persuasively; and never treated controversially. The Saviour never proves its truth or its justice by abstract reasonings. The Apostles never demonstrate, by arguments, the certainty or the necessity of the hell they proclaim. Both assert it, as they do the being of God, in unequivocal and unqualified terms. They never recognise nor refer to any objection, aversion, doubt, or question, which any one might entertain on the subject. If there were, in their audiences, those who professed to find any thing in the divine character or government, with which hell is inconsistent; or any thing in the nature of human guilt, which renders it unjust; or any thing in the gospel, which disproves it; neither Christ nor his apostles ever paid such reasoners the compliment of reasoning with them. Both unbelievers and doubters, on other subjects, were often and anxiously argued with. The Saviour went particularly and fully into any detail, or any line of argument, in order to prove to gainsayers his Messiahship and Sonship. And the Apostles not only met all the popular objections and prejudices against the doctrines of grace, but seem even to have anticipated the more *profound* evasions of future times; that, thus, they might "cut off occasion," from all who sought occasion for urging their feelings or their philosophy against the gospel

of the grace of God. But not thus—never thus, do they treat the unbelief of the heart, or of the mind, on the subject of hell. Like heaven and God it is left to speak for itself. As the sacred writers never prove, by reasoning, that there is a heaven, neither do they argue the fact of hell with any man. They no more think it necessary to prove that eternal misery is not too *bad* to be true, than that eternal glory is not too *good* to be true. The horrors of the former are no more allowed to bring its truth into debate or doubt, than the raptures of the latter are allowed to bring its reality into question. Both are placed and left on the single ground of *inspired assertion*. Both are amply described, but neither is ever discussed.

Now this is what is wanted. Ministers, and teachers, and parents, must say nothing of hell but what God hath said; and that only in his own words, in general. Man is not equal to amplify the revelation of wrath. He is not to be trusted with optional freedom in depicting the horrors of a desolate eternity. He cannot keep his own wrath out of gratuitous descriptions of the wrath of God and the Lamb. Whenever, therefore, it is brought in as “a fiery stream,” it should be self-evident that “the breath of Jehovah” hath kindled it. Whenever the “horrible tempest” is shown, it should be seen that HE rains “the snares, fire, and brimstone.” Whenever a minister descends into the bottomless pit to describe it, he must manifest that he is no more in his *element* than was the “mighty angel” of the Apocalypse, who descended to bind Satan; and yet, like that angel, he must not flinch nor falter; but use as freely and honestly all that God has said, as the angel used the “great chain.” The hell of the Bible, like the heaven of the Bible, needs no colouring, and admits of no softening.

It is, therefore, equally pitiful when, in reference to future misery, one minister acquires the name of a *harsh* preacher, and another that of a *gentle* preacher. He is unwise, who attempts to terrify by other visions of hell than those which revelation presents; and he is worse than un-

wise, who is less ample or explicit than Christ was. It is shameful to plead the gentleness of Christ, or the mild genius of Christianity, as a warrant for touching, seldom or slightly, on the painful subject of "everlasting destruction." This is a mere pretence. Christ is the great preacher of the wrath to come. He spoke more frequently and more emphatically of it, than any or all the messengers of God. And the only mildness of the genius of the Gospel, on this subject, is, the perfect freeness, fulness, and certainty of the salvation from that wrath, which it proffers and proclaims. It pretends to and warrants none of that *mildness*, which conceals or softens hell. It makes no provision, and no allowance, for the weakness of any man's nerves, or for the delicacy of his taste, or for the conjectures of his reason, except the provision for saving him from the reality of that hell, the prospect of which shocks him. The gospel provides amply for our safety from hell; but not at all to exempt us from believing the eternity of future punishment, or our own exposure to it. Indeed, the truth of that hell, and of our own danger, is the very basis or occasion of all the glad tidings of the gospel. They are glad tidings of great joy, just because Tophet is an eternal reality, and sin an infinite evil.

Let men know, therefore, what they are about, whilst debating, or doubting, or evading this point: they are both rejecting the gospel, and treating God as a liar. That gospel proceeds upon the very fact and principle, that the punishment of sin is "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." How, then, can it be believed, whilst this is disbelieved? Believing it in order to be made better, or in order to make sure of heaven, is very proper and necessary; but this is not enough. It is the gospel of deliverance from the wrath to come; and must, therefore, be believed for the sake of that deliverance. But for this, it is not, and cannot be believed, if the danger is questioned.

Here, then, is the real cause of nominal faith, and of its prevalence. Very few believe that they deserve, or have

incurred, the wrath of God. The generality think, whatever they may say, that they do not deserve eternal punishment. Accordingly, the belief they give to the gospel, is given to it as a moral remedy ; or as a true religion ; or as an authenticated history. It is believed, just as if there were no hell ; or as if sin did not lead to the place “ prepared for the devil and his angels.” In a word, the current credence it obtains in the nation, is not for the sake of what is the *first* purpose for which Christ died ; which is, to “ deliver from going down to the pit.”

Here an important question arises :—how is this inveterate disbelief of danger to be vanquished ? Now, I may safely assert, at once, that it never was vanquished in any mind, by abstract reasonings on the nature or the desert of sin. The cry, “ Lord, save, I perish,” was not won nor wrung from your own heart by the force of moral or legislative considerations. You are not a trophy nor a monument of the power of abstract truth. It is not, chiefly, because you see how sin affects the character and government of God, that you believe the certainty and the necessity of eternal punishment. Your former unbelief on this point was borne down, and is kept down, just by the solemn fact, that God has said that “ the wicked shall be turned into hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” It is the weight of His declarations, and not your own insight into the nature of things, or into the philosophy of moral government, that fixes your convictions of hell. Its revealed truth enables you to reason on its abstract justice ; and all the character of the great atonement confirms your reasonings ; but it was on the single and solemn ground of “ Thus saith the Lord,” that you began either to reason or believe. Your faith, in this matter, stands on the word of God, and not on the word of man, nor on your natural perceptions of the eternal fitness of things.

Now, what won you to flee from the wrath to come, and thus to believe on Christ for everlasting life, is just what is wanted in the case of all nominal believers. They cannot

be argued nor enticed into the belief of their danger. No exposure of the defects of their faith, will remedy these defects. The wisdom of man is foolishness here, whenever it tries to drive or draw without considerations "full of immortality." We must have faith in the force of God's own words, on the subject of heaven and hell. They want no helping out from man. What is wanted, is, the full impression of them; the spiritual apprehension of them; the solemn realization of their truth and interest. Then, both the formal and the heartless must feel, that they are not believing the gospel, whilst they continue to disbelieve their own danger of perishing; and must see, that they are at open issue with God on a turning point in religion. Now, as even the most heedless would not give himself credit for any real faith in the gospel if he doubted and hated the doctrine of it concerning HEAVEN; his secret disbelief of his doctrine concerning HELL, may and ought to be publicly charged on him as proof of his unbelief.

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### No. V.

#### SPIRITUAL DECLENSION, FROM NOT REALIZING ETERNITY.

AT first sight, it seems *surprising*, as well as deplorable, that we should ever sink into heartless formality in the worship of God, or into cold apathy under the Word of God; seeing his word is the only substitute we have for his presence, and his worship the chief emblem and prelude of heaven. And yet, there are times, and these, alas! too frequent, when we pray without fervency, and praise without gratitude, and hear without any lively interest. Truths which have made "our heart burn within us," can hardly fix our ear then; and songs and supplications which have been almost "unutterable," by their intensity, are scarcely

worth uttering then, owing to their heartlessness. The words of prayer and praise are the same ; but the spirit and the life of them are gone. Even the natural *tones* have forsaken the terms of devotion. The very sound of honest and artless feeling is lost.

Now, we may well be ashamed of such declensions of the spirit of devotion : but, ought we to wonder at them ? Is it really surprising that the power of godliness should thus evaporate, until the very form of it is ready to vanish away ?

However this may be, we are surprised as well as sorry. We do wonder that truths and duties, which have often both interested and absorbed our whole soul, should ever become either tame or tedious, dim or dull, to us. We feel this especially, when they become so, even whilst we are not unholy nor untender in our general character or conduct ; and when we cannot trace the unhappy change of feeling to any change of habits. We are conscious that a blight has fallen upon our spirit ; but unconscious of bringing it on by any allowed misconduct. Our character is much the same, as when our spirit was lively and devotional : and, as we have not relinquished nor altered any of our religious principles, we are amazed, as well as grieved, that our hearts should become thus alienated from the power of religion.

In this dilemma is it not uncommon to have recourse to a false principle of explanation. Some ascribe the decay to the *sovereign* withdrawal of the Divine Presence ; meaning by that, the hiding of God's countenance from the soul, as an *experiment* upon the soul. Others, justly afraid of resolving into absolute sovereignty, what is but too easily explained by the weakness of human nature, ascribe the decay to that weakness. They say, " it is only what might be expected in the case of imperfect creatures, whilst in a world so imperfect." Thus they lay their account with sinking into occasional deadness and formality ; and regard the declension as a matter of course, or of inevitable necessity.

This solution is as unwise as the other is impious. Not,

however, that there are no circumstances which upset the power of godliness for a time. There are : and, under them, the Christian is, perhaps, quite as much an object of pity as of blame. The shock of sudden calamity, or a severe prostration of strength and spirits, is almost sure to overpower, or impair, the spirituality of the mind. Neither devotional habits nor feelings, which have been formed in health and prosperity, can accommodate themselves, at once, to pain and poverty. They are both shaken and shattered for a time. And, then, it is not improper nor imprudent to take the full comfort of the gracious assurance, that our pitying Father "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust."

It is not, however, safe nor wise to have recourse to this principle, when neither the body nor the mind is broken down by care. Any decay of spirituality that occurs, whilst we are in ordinary circumstances of character and condition, will be found to spring from inattention to ETERNITY.

This is a much more frequent and fruitful source of religious declension than we are apt to suspect, or willing to believe ; because we forget or overlook the degree in which the light of eternity was upon divine things, when we were first and most affected by them. This is the real *secret* of those relapses, which we cannot account for, when there has been no moral defection. The light of eternity has been suffered to pass off from the objects of faith and the acts of devotion.

If you are not fully aware of this, or did not observe how much a sense of eternity blended with all your first and strongest impressions of divine things, the consideration of it will amply repay you for both the time and thought it calls for.

Now, at whatever point of truth your serious impressions began, the *force* of that point was derived from eternity. Even if your heart was first moved and melted by the *love of Christ*, this is the fact of the case. You, indeed, thought of nothing, at the moment, but the glories, grace, and sacri-

fice of the Lamb of God. All your wonder and gratitude were concentrated upon his person and work. He was "All and All, and altogether lovely," in the views which then captivated and conquered your heart. And, had any one said to you, at that sacred moment, that you were thinking of eternity, you would have replied, "I think, I can think, of nothing but the amazing and melting love of my Saviour; and of my own guilt and folly, in not thinking of it sooner."

There was, however, much reference to eternity in all this process and pressure of thought and feeling. You, indeed, were not conscious of it; because, like sunlight on flowers, the light of eternity does not divide our attention between itself and the objects it shines on. It was, however, there; blended with, and beautifying, every view of the Saviour and salvation. Accordingly, had you analyzed your own thoughts at the time, or afterward, you would have found that they had not only glanced alternately at the past and future eternity of the love of Christ; but, also, that its eternity was the very *crown* of its worth and glory. For, had He not loved for eternity, and redeemed for eternity, you could not have thought nor felt as you did. Had any doubt of eternity itself, or of the eternal duration of his love, mingled with your meditations, they would not have been transporting nor transforming in their influence.

There was, however, more than an undoubting recognition of eternity, in your adoring views of the Saviour. They were based upon, and blended with, a settled and solemn persuasion of the immortality of your soul. Your spirit, although unconscious of its own transitions between eternity and the cross, was yet, and all the while, glancing from the one to the other, and linking both together. Its movements were too numerous and rapid to be felt as transitions of thought or feeling, at the moment; but, now that you begin to analyze them, you perceive that you were employing the glories of the cross to soften eternity, and the glories of eternity to enshrine the cross. Thus all your

most realizing and influential views of the Lamb slain, were full of immortality. Eternity was all around the cross, as the flood around the ark ; and though your eye, in its intended and intense gaze, was fixed, like the dove's, on the refuge ; like hers also, it darted sidelong and swift and perpetual glances on the surrounding waters.

Now, as this was the real character of your first and finest views of the Saviour and salvation, and as they derived so much of their power and glory from their connexion with eternity, it is not wonderful that both their power and their glory should decay, whenever you lose sight of eternity, or cease to look at the cross in the light of it.

In like manner, if your personal piety began in a deep sense of the value of your *soul*, that solemn conviction derived its chief solemnity from eternity. It was more than based on, or blended with, the consciousness of immortality: it was "full" of immortality. It would have been powerless, yea, been nothing, but for eternity. For, whatever you thought or felt, in regard to any or all the powers of the mind, it was the fact of their being eternal powers, that arrested and riveted your attention. It was memory, as remembering for ever ; it was imagination, as creative for ever ; it was reason, as reasoning for ever ; it was conscience, as judging for ever—that awed and amazed you. Eternal consciousness ! eternal thought ! eternal feeling ! was the absorbing consideration. It was not mental power, as mental ; nor moral sense, as moral ; but the eternity of mind and conscience, that impressed you. It was not the degree in which the soul was capable of enjoying or suffering ; but the "everlasting" *duration* of future joy or wo, that determined you to care for your soul. Accordingly, had its faculties been both fewer and feebler, and even incapable of any improvement, here or hereafter, their eternity would have stamped and sustained them as infinitely valuable, in your estimation. And, as they must advance for ever, as well as endure for ever, you certainly did not

overrate their value, when you resolved not to lose your soul.

Now, if these solemn views of the immortality of your spirit have been allowed to pass away, or to languish into cold and heartless forms of thought, it is not surprising that you should kneel at the mercy-seat without enjoyment, and at the cross without feeling. For, how can the soul, when it has become almost insensible to its own immortal nature, and immense value, and amazing faculties, feel alive in prayer or meditation? How can the throne of grace be attractive, or the cross dear, "as in the days of old," when you no longer come to them under a deep or distinct consciousness of your immortality?

The want, or the weakness, of this, is just as incompatible with a devotional spirit, as the want or weakness of humility, penitence, or faith. Now, you are fully aware, that a self-righteous, or a self-sufficient spirit, does not, and cannot, find communion with God, nor comfort from the promises. You know well, that if you forget your guilt or weakness, you are neither successful nor urgent in prayer. Accordingly, you find it necessary, and make it convenient, to keep up an habitual sense of your sinfulness and unworthiness, that thus you may be humble before God, whenever you appear before Him in the sanctuary or the closet. All this is as it should be. The habitual consciousness of immortality is, however, as necessary as humility. Indeed, humility will not be very deep, when the sense of immortality is dim. The latter is not, indeed, like the former, one of the "graces" of the Spirit; but it is the element in which they were all born, and out of which none of them thrive well. We are not repenting well, when we are not repenting for eternity; nor believing well, when we are not believing for eternity; nor praying well, when we are not praying with an express reference to eternity.

It is, therefore, of supreme importance to acquire and keep up a vivid sense of immortality, if you would keep up the power of your principles, and the exercises of your

graces. It is as an immortal spirit, that your soul will be most reverential in the presence of "the Father of spirits;" and most humble in the presence of "the Father of mercies;" and most believing in the presence of "the Father of lights." It is as an immortal spirit, it will best worship the Eternal Spirit "in spirit and truth."

If, again, your personal piety began in deep and solemn convictions of the *evil of sin*, they, too, derived both their depth and solemnity from the fact, that the punishment of sin is eternal. This is true, even if your convictions arose chiefly from the manifestation of the evil of sin, which is given by the cross of Christ. Now, nowhere else does sin appear so "exceeding sinful," as in the agony and ignominy of the Saviour. That his blood was required in order to atone for it, throws every other proof of its evil into the shade; and is the only proof that *silences* all the questions and equivocations of unbelief. Abstract reasonings about sin being an infinite evil—because committed against an infinite God; and because its tendency is to dethrone God; and because its nature is to go on from bad to worse for ever and ever—do not, whatever be the cause of their failure, bring home an *abiding* conviction of the evil of sin. However true the logic, or legitimate the conclusions, of such reasonings may be, sophistry can wind its way through, or wing its way over them all, if they are not hung upon the cross of Christ. Accordingly, those who see nothing in the cross but a martyr's altar, see nothing in sin but a temporary evil, pardonable apart from all atonement. None of their views of God or man alarm them at sin; except when it is so gross as to be disgraceful, or so horrid as to be shocking.

But even where Calvary produces a conviction of sin, which Sinai could not do; and the gospel a fear of sin, which the law cannot implant, both derive their point and power from eternity. And in this way—the punishment of sin being eternal in its duration, when it is inflicted upon sinners, what must have been the amount and intensity of

the Saviour's sufferings, when his soul was made "an offering for sin?" "Wrath to the uttermost" is not inflicted by God, for the sake of trying what its "uttermost" is. Neither the degree nor the duration of it in hell, is, or can be, any pleasure to Him. He has actually sworn by his life, that he has "no pleasure" in the death of a sinner. Its very uttermost is, therefore, the very *least* that, in justice to his own character and government, he can inflict. And, as that least is eternal, there must have been in the Saviour's "CUP," a bitterness, unspeakable and inconceivable to men or angels. If, however, this view of the evil of sin belongs to that class of proofs, which do not implant abiding convictions, because they do not impale themselves beyond all controversy, still, it is from eternity, in some form, that the death of Christ derives its unspeakable power of "convincing of sin." We, indeed, may not see nor feel this, whilst beholding the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. The glory veiled, and the vials broken, and the agonies endured, on that solemn occasion, seem more than enough, without a reference to eternity, to account for all our deepest convictions of the evil of sin. The darkness and tempest around the cross, whilst they cover and convulse the heavens and the earth, seem to render all reference to the eternal "blackness of darkness" unnecessary. But even on Calvary, and at the very crisis of the atoning sacrifice, eternity is present to the mind, however much it may be absorbed with the sufferings of Christ. For, were a doubt of the eternal punishment of sin to flash across the mind, at that moment; or were the wrath he redeemed from not eternal; both the dread and the hatred of sin, which the cross inspires, would not be what they are in the heart of believers. But we are, however unconsciously and unintentionally, glancing from time to time at the eternity of the wrath which He is delivering from. There is mingled with all our emotions of grief and gratitude, a real, though secret, reference to the eternity of misery, which, but for his atonement, would have been our inevitable por-

tion; and to the eternity of happiness which, by faith in his atonement, may be our inheritance.

This is only saying in other words, that we are not insensible to the *design* of the atonement, whilst most affected by its solemnities. Indeed, the very reason why our thoughts and feelings are so concentrated on the cross, and so absorbed by the wonders of redemption, is because the redemption of the cross is eternal. For, were it not so, neither its attraction nor its influence could be so powerful. It being, therefore, self-evident that eternity set the confirming seal upon those convictions of the evil and danger of sin, which shut us up to Christ for pardon, and to the Spirit for sanctification, it is certain that sin, if shifted out of this light, will not be so dreaded as to endear the cross, nor so hated as to honour the Holy Spirit. For as we should not have fled to the Saviour or to the Sanctifier, had we not seen the flaming sword of the law in the hand of eternity, neither shall we cleave to them steadfastly, if we cease to view sin in this connexion. Nor is this all: there is no small danger of even tampering with sin, if it be not looked at in this light. All backsliding of heart and life is brought on by losing sight of eternity. No one forsakes "the fountain of living waters," whilst its waters sparkle with the light of eternity. No one drinks from polluted streams, until he has shaded them from that light.

If, again, your personal piety began in impressive and exalted views of the *divine character and government*, it was eternity that invested them with power and glory. Whatever lovely view of God first affected and won your heart, the perfection of its beauty was in the fact, that "this God is our God, for ever and ever." Whatever solemn view of God awed your spirit, its weight lay in the consideration, that "from everlasting," such had been his majesty, and "to everlasting," such it would be. Whatever attraction or terror brought you under the shadow of his wings, the full sense of safety came from this, "the eternal God is thy refuge." And whenever you have felt through all your soul,

that his "loving kindness is better than life," it was the eternity of it that eclipsed the charms of life, and softened the aspect of death.

The fact is, that, in all our *first* intentional and deliberate contemplations of God, and approaches to God, we were thinking and acting with an express reference to eternity : for, at first, they had nothing else to terminate upon. Now, that we have a name, or a place, or both, to maintain in the church and the world, our prayers and meditations often terminate on them. Our immediate solicitude often goes no farther than to be kept from forfeiting or disgracing our profession ; whereas, before we made a public profession of religion, it went all the length of eternal safety at once. Now, however, we usually advance to this final point, step by step. It is, of course, still our goal : but, at first, it was both our goal and our starting-place. We began and ended our devotional exercises, with an express regard to our future state. We had not then given to the world or the church, solemn pledges of faith or repentance. We had not committed ourselves, publicly, to any creed, service, or connexion. All our piety was then personal ; and irresponsible to man. It implicated the character of no church, nor the tendency of any system. All its actings had their source and centre in our individual salvation. But now, they have other bearings and motives ; and these, although not different from the former, are yet distinct enough to divide our attention between time and eternity. Accordingly, many of our prayers, and more of our thoughts, terminate upon present consistency, rather than upon future safety ; upon living well, rather than upon dying well.

This, of course, is not to be regretted. Our daily prayers and meditations ought to bear, with point and power, on the duties and trials of the day. We cannot die happy, if we do not live to some good purpose. It is, however, equally true, that the concentration of all our solicitude upon a godly life, is not the best way of maintaining personal godliness. More than effort is necessary, in order to follow

holiness well. Motives must be freely admitted, if rules and laws are to be cheerfully or impartially obeyed. In a word : our time will not be well spent, if our eternity be seldom realized. Whilst, therefore, it would be highly improper to lessen our attention to the practical duties of life or godliness, it is also highly imprudent to allow even them to divert our attention from eternity. But for its solemn influence, we had never believed nor obeyed the gospel from the heart ; and, therefore, that influence must be cherished, if we would continue to believe or obey. Having begun as immortal, we must not go on as mortal. Having set out as the children of eternity, we must not subside into mere children of time. That would be another form of the Galatian error. Gal. iii. 3.

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### No. VI.

#### FAITH, BELIEVING UNTO ETERNAL LIFE.

WELL might the believing of the primitive Christians be called, "precious faith," and "most holy faith:" for its influence upon their *spirits* was equally soothing and cheering ; and upon their *character*, equally ennobling and sanctifying. No man can think lightly of their joy or peace in believing. Their joy was "unspeakable and full of glory;" and their peace surpassed "all understanding." Every one whose heart has ever ached, whose conscience has ever smarted, whose spirits have ever been low, can and must envy such joy and peace. Even our modern Balaams, who are absorbed in the love of the world, must acknowledge that this is a joy which the world cannot give, and a peace which they do not find ; for even they have intervals of depression and pain which quite qualify them,

at the time, to comprehend how the first Christians were happier in poverty, than they are with wealth. And, if worldlings can judge thus, from mere "vexation of spirit," no wonder if we who have had, in addition to our share of that vexation, spiritual discoveries of our guilt and danger, should envy the spiritual happiness of the primitive believers. We can appreciate their joy as saints, because we have experienced something of their sorrows and fears as sinners. Our souls have been in their souls' place, when "the iron entered" into them; and, therefore, we naturally wish our souls to be also in their place, when all their wounds were healed, and all their fears dispelled. We have joined them in the solemn question, "What shall I do to be saved?" and, therefore, we wish to join them in the triumphant song, "Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." We have had fellowship of spirit with them in the piercing cry, "Lord save, I perish;" and we desire communion with them in the grateful acknowledgment, "He hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling." We have been partakers of their fears of the wrath to come; and, therefore, we long to be partakers of their good and lively hope of the glory to be revealed.

Not that we are utter strangers to all peace or joy in believing. It is because we have tasted something of both, that we are so intent on "drinking abundantly" of the cup of salvation. The difference between our spiritual happiness, and that of the first believers, is not one of *kind*, but of degree. They seem to have had an *abiding* spirit of adoption; an abiding sense of pardon and acceptance; an abiding witness of the Holy Spirit; an abiding confidence in the wisdom of Providence and the sufficiency of grace. I mean, abiding, as compared with the extreme changeableness of modern joy and peace. Their happiness was not absolutely unchangeable, nor uniform; but their alternations of hope and fear—of light and darkness—of assurance and doubt, were neither so great nor any thing like so frequent

as our changes. This is so true and striking, that we have often questioned the reality of our own faith, on the single ground of its failing to produce such joy and peace as they experienced. Indeed, we are sometimes tempted to suspect, that much of their comfort must have sprung from the *miraculous* gifts of the Spirit, as well as from his gracious influences; and that, thus, it is impossible to acquire, now, so much enjoyment. This, however, even if true to a far greater extent than can be proved or suspected, was counterbalanced by the peculiar and manifold trials of the primitive Christians. Any miraculous gifts which the generality had, were not more than a counterpoise to their fiery trials, from which we are exempt. Our dispensation of Providence is a better boon, and more adapted to promote spiritual enjoyment, than their dispensation of the Spirit—so far it was miraculous. Accordingly, neither their joy nor peace is ever explained, by a reference to their *gifts*, but always ascribed to the abundance of grace. As the Saviour taught the apostles and evangelists to rejoice, “because their names were written in heaven,” so they taught their converts to find their comfort in the everlasting gospel itself, and not in evanescent endowments. We must not look at circumstances, therefore, for the secret of that “strong consolation” which was so common in the apostolic churches. Nothing that was supernatural in their lot, exceeded what was trying to flesh and blood in it. As on the globe, the greatest seas are hung opposite the greatest mountains, to balance them, so floods of affliction were not more than counterpoised by miracles.

What, then, was the real *secret* of that copious, calm, and holy enjoyment, which the first believers so habitually possessed? They had no foundation of hope, that we have not: no warrant or welcome to build on the Rock of Ages, that we have not: no promises nor prospects, that we have not. Jesus Christ is the same in our “day,” as He was in their “yesterday.” The Tree of Life bends its loaded and luxuriant branches, as fully down to our hands, as it did to

their hands. Why is it, then, that whilst we see those who came first around that tree, healed by its leaves, and cheered by its fruit, many of us are afraid to taste, and more of us but half-healed and half-refreshed? Now, the fact is, they "eat" for the express and immediate purpose that they might "LIVE FOR EVER." Their faith was, from the beginning to the end, a direct "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

This fact, thus stated, may not strike you at first sight. There is, however, more in it than meets the eye at once. *Immediate* and *express* believing for eternal life, is not so common nor so habitual as it seems. All real faith has, of course, eternal life as its grand and final object; and, in this respect, we, as much as the first believers, have, as the end of our faith, "the salvation" of our souls, "with eternal joy." But if we make this a *remote* object, and if they made it their immediate object, there will, there must, be a difference between our faith and theirs, as to *degree*, which cannot fail to produce a corresponding difference of comfort. Now, what is the sober fact, in regard to the ordinary and everyday exercise of our faith in Christ? The truth is, it neither embraces nor aims at much beyond *safety for the day*; and the consequence is, that it gathers but little strength from such exercise. On days of peculiar trial or temptation, it is put upon the stretch, and compelled to draw largely upon the provisions of the everlasting covenant. In like manner, on days of peculiar refreshing in the sanctuary, it is charmed into lively exercise and lofty aspiration. But, in general, these extraordinary actings of faith are called forth by extraordinary circumstances; and, accordingly, whilst we are not much tried or tempted, nor powerfully stirred up by spirit-stirring appeals, we put forth no more faith than just what will keep us from going back in religion; and, alas, not always so much! Now, such tame and restricted believing cannot lead to much or strong consolation. It is not *conversant* with the sources of spiritual comfort. Paul, with all his charity, would not say to

us, whilst our faith was thus idle, "Now the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing." *Such* believing would incur his censure, or throw him upon his knees to pray for an increase of our faith.

We must, however, go still deeper into the ordinary state of our minds, before we can see clearly the grand cause of the difference between the degree of our own comfort, and that of the first believers. Now our tendency is, to defer believing for eternity, until we come to the *verge* of eternity. We do not like to bring the matter of final safety to a full issue every day; nor to go far into it any day, whilst we feel no pressing occasion. Like those who shrink from making their last WILL, lest such a distinct recognition of their mortality should shorten their life, we are inclined to leave the question of our personal safety unsettled, whilst we are in health. We have no objection to such a state of mind, from day to day, as would furnish all the materials for dying well, if a sudden summons should come. We are even willing to be, to a considerable extent, "as men waiting for the coming of their Lord." Not, however, alas! because we long or wish for his coming; we do not desire it, until we have no other prospect; but we do feel the necessity of not forgetting it, nor preparation for it altogether. We dread the bare idea of being found "asleep," or with "lamps gone out," when our Lord cometh. We wish to have our lamps so far filled and trimmed, that they shall burst into a steady flame, the moment we are called to meet the Bridegroom. This is, however, almost all that we can say, with perfect truth, concerning the habitual tone of our piety. We leave much to be done and settled on our death-bed. We content ourselves with doing pretty well from day to day; and postpone to our last days, the full settlement of our personal interest in Christ. So much uncertainty do we allow to hang over this question, that we actually promise to crowd the close of life with mightier and more pointed acts of faith on the Son of God, than any that we put forth now. And we feel that it will be *necessary* to do so

then, if we would be either triumphant or tranquil in death. Hence the intense solicitude we occasionally pour into that hymn,

“O for an overcoming faith,  
To cheer my dying hours!”

Now all this shows how little immediate and express reference our daily faith has to eternal life. It terminates more on present comfort than on future safety; on momentary ease, than on everlasting glory. And then—it is so easy to believe for all the daily mercy and grace which we *feel* in need of, whilst there is nothing very trying in our lot, that our faith is not able to meet emergencies, when they come unexpectedly upon us. In fact, we suspect that it is little better than *unbelief*, when we feel how it fails, whenever we are compelled to look death steadfastly in the face. I pray you to mark this usual effect of the prospect of death, on our ordinary faith. When any thing like a mortal qualm quivers around the heart; or any disorder assumes a fatal aspect; or any stroke of death falls so near us as to stun us, or as to startle us into a keen sense of personal and pressing danger, we naturally betake ourselves to the exercise of believing prayer. Knowing that to be our only resource, we flee to it at once. But, lo! all is hurry, and flutter, and confusion, in our spirit. We seem to have no faith! Like Hezekiah, we turn our face to the wall, and weep bitterly; we are so shocked to find that we had contented ourselves with a kind of faith which seldom, or but slightly, faced the dread solemnities of death and eternity; or with a degree of faith, which had always shrunk from them, and now sunk under them.

These are awful moments, and humiliating discoveries! How we upbraid ourselves during their pressure, for the indecision, the folly, the infatuation, of a process of believing, which did not go all the length of looking daily for mercy, “unto eternal life.” How we resolve that, if spared, we will make sure work for eternity; and enter upon a new

life of faith on the Son of God, which shall *deserve* the name of faith. Accordingly, we did, for a time, after being thus startled and humbled, set ourselves in good earnest, to believe unto the saving of our souls, with an everlasting salvation. We returned to the point and spirit of our first applications to the Saviour. We knelt at the mercy-seat, laying hold of the cross with one hand, and of eternal life with the other hand. We thus kept in view the final end of faith, as well as its immediate objects; and honestly told ourselves, that any thing less than meeting the whole question of final safety, must render the next approach of death as overwhelming as the former.

We remember all this well. It is, therefore, humiliating to confess, that, notwithstanding this solemn lesson, and after acting on it for some time, we have again and again relapsed into our old habit of resting in *half* measures; and of living, praying, and believing *for the day*, and not for eternity. We continue, indeed, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ," every day; but not, every day, looking for it, "unto eternal life."

By this time you are willing to go into the question, how came the primitive Christians to acquire such a realizing and habitual sense of the glory and solemnity of eternal life? How did they manage to keep on believing *up* to the "*end*" of faith? The real answer to this question cannot be short, and satisfactory too. It is necessary, in order to understand their case, to have the whole of it before us, both in substance and detail.

Observe, then, how their faith was solicited and enforced, in the first instance. Now, it was not claimed, at the outset, by temporal nor by temporary considerations. The first appeals they heard, on behalf of faith in Christ, were not founded on the reasonableness of faith; nor on its holy influence; nor on the mere criminality of unbelief; but on the eternal advantages of believing in Christ. Everlasting happiness was the *first* thing proposed to them by the gospel. It said nothing to them about the beauty or the ne-

cessity of holiness, until it had made to them a full disclosure, and a free offer, of that glorious heaven, which deserves all the holiness it demands ;—nothing to them about the duty or the privilege of prayer, until it had presented to them the prospect of that eternal communion with God and the Lamb, of which prayer is the pledge and the prelude ;—nothing to them about joining the church, or celebrating her sacraments, until it had tried upon their souls all the attractions of the church of the first-born, and of the marriage-supper of the Lamb, in heaven. Thus eternal life was the grand thing which they began to believe on Christ for. Their faith did not, indeed, stop there : nor was it allowed to overlook any of the practical designs of the gospel. It was not, however, made, in the first instance, to travel through them, step by step, until it reached the hope of glory, as the *result* of obedience ; but it was lifted to that immortal hope at once, and then led into all the paths of virtue and holiness. Thus an almost personified eternity, in all its grandeur, placed before them the high claims of the Saviour on their confidence and subjection. Their faith was asked and won, amidst vivid visions of the pealing harps, the sparkling crowns, and the eternal mansions, of the general assembly in heaven. Nor was this all. That “opened” heaven came before them, confronted with an equally opened hell. They had, therefore, in believing, to look all that glory, and all that wrath, full in the face ; and to believe *up* to the point of deliverance from that wrath, and of a title to that glory.

Now, need I say that, in order to the exercise of such faith, they must have looked closer and oftener at “the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ,” than if they had only been believing in order to be fit for baptism and the sacrament ; or for the purpose of becoming better, and being in the right way ? You see, at a glance, that their views of his mercy must have been as vast and vivid as their views of heaven and hell ; and their faith in his mercy as strong as their faith in eternal things. Slight notions of the person or

work of Christ, and doubtful faith in Him, would not have lifted them over the fear of perishing, nor up to the hope of salvation. And, as they found enough in the Lamb slain to meet all the wants and perils of their case, no wonder if they continued looking for his mercy unto eternal life. The *needle* of their faith was so magnetized by eternity at first, that it turned to that pole for ever after.

Now, did our believing begin thus? Had it such a full and distinct reference to "eternal redemption?" Perhaps not exactly. It had, however, a pointed reference to escape from the wrath to come, at first; and, if it has a less pointed one now, that is one reason why our comfort is less than that of the primitive believers. They did not satisfy themselves with believing that their escape was possible; nor with believing that it was not improbable; nor with believing that they were as likely to escape as others. They did not hush up nor hurry over the great question in this sluggish and superficial way. They seem to have both avoided and disdained that *half-way* faith, which places itself just so near the Refuge, that it can, as it imagines, flee into it on a moment's warning. Indeed, they seem to have had no idea of that paltry policy in religion, which just abstains from going altogether *out of sight* of the Cross, or *out of reach* of the Refuge: but which abstains equally from coming under their shadow or their authority. This was not the religion of the first Christians. Nothing stilled or stilled their cry, "What shall we do to be saved," but a faith which could say, "We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved." Even good signs did not satisfy them. We never hear any of them banishing or balancing their sense of danger, by an appeal to the *convictions* they felt under one sermon; or to the *tears* they shed under another; or to the *vows* they made at the sacrament; or to the *prayers* they poured out in the day of trouble. They did not, of course, think lightly of these things, nor exclude them from the catalogue of experimental exercises: but neither did they rest in them as

grounds of safety, nor allow them to keep the soul from making a full and final committal of itself into the hands of Christ. Indeed, they could not compromise their safety in this way ; because they did not, or durst not, shut their eyes on either the eternal heaven which had captivated them, nor on the eternal hell which had alarmed them.

Now, if we feel that there has been, in our own case, a less impression of, or a less reference to, heaven and hell ; and, that in consequence of this estrangement of our thoughts from eternity, we have rather gone on looking for mercy, “ unto,” a *long* life, or an *easy* life, or even a *good* life, than “ unto eternal life ;” it is necessary, and it is high time, to resume our first views of the great salvation, and even to brighten them by profounder meditation.

Another circumstance which gave point and power to the faith of the first Christians was, that they were the *first*. I do not mean by this, the sublimity nor the responsibility of the distinction. They could hardly be aware of either, for some time. What I mean is, that they were not influenced in their believing, by the *memory* of their parents and other departed friends ; and, thus, were in no danger of mistaking an hereditary creed, for personal faith ; or veneration of a parent’s piety, for love to his God and Saviour. They had no *family* links between their hearts and heaven, when they began to believe unto eternal life. No last injunction of a dying father or mother induced them to flee from the wrath to come. None of the Gentiles, at least, had upon their soul a solemn charge from any departing spirit, to prepare to meet it on the right of the Judge ; but each convert had to act on the force of his own convictions, and of his own faith in the gospel.

Now, this, although no enviable position, was not unfavourable to decision of character. The very pain of these circumstances promoted sincerity and promptitude. Every Gentile convert had to act for himself, and on his own resources, in forming those views of faith and practice, which form the character for heaven. Whatever, therefore, he

lacked of relative motive, he was not diverted from personal decision, by family hopes or habits.

We cannot, of course, regret, but must rejoice, that heaven comes before us not desolate of ancestral spirits. It is no small part of our happiness to believe, that some of those, who were nearest and dearest to us on earth, are now before the throne ; and even there continue to love us, and to long for us to join them. These are golden links between our hearts and heaven ! and might be expected, as they are well calculated, to draw our thoughts and affections very often and very far heavenward. And they have this sweet influence, whenever we allow them to exert it. It is, however, necessary to take care lest this ardent love to those who are "for ever with the Lord," be mistaken for love to the Lord himself. For, although we cannot love them too ardently, we are in danger of loving him too coldly ; and of looking more at heaven in the softened form of meeting *them*, than in the solemn form of meeting God. It was in the latter form chiefly, that the first Christians looked at eternity ; and, therefore, their piety was an habitual preparation to meet God. And, surely, ours ought not, need not, to be different, seeing we expect to meet so many endeared spirits at the same time with him ! For, so far as this fond hope softens the solemn interview which we anticipate, so far it ought to increase and quicken our anticipations of it.

Another circumstance which gave great point and conclusiveness to the faith of the first believers, was, the peril of life at which they became Christians. An open and avowed "looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life," was, in fact, the risking of *temporal* life, as well as of property, and freedom, and reputation. It required, therefore, an habitual looking at the things which are unseen and eternal, in order to balance at all the loss of the things which are seen and temporal. Nothing less than such a familiarity with their "enduring substance in heaven," could have reconciled or enabled them to peril life and substance on earth as they did.

Their heavenly-mindedness was not, however, the virtue of *necessity*, on their part. They did not take up with heaven, because of the peculiar uncertainty of life and property at the time ; but, for the sake of eternal life, they voluntarily and deliberately hazarded every thing. Their privations were the effects, not the cause, of their choice. Nor did they repent of that choice, when its effects proved fatal. In vain, therefore, do we attempt to excuse, by the tendency of easier circumstances, our inferior heavenly-mindedness. We are not, indeed, thrown so directly and constantly on eternity for comfort, as they were. We have more "vineyards in the wilderness" than they had. The lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage, compared with their lot. But, do we, dare we, turn this into a reason, or an excuse, for thinking but seldom and slightly of the glory to be revealed ? A heart thoroughly and habitually "right with God," would find in this change for the better, nothing but reasons and motives for a higher degree of heavenly-mindedness ; because we thus possess more time, and convenience, and composure, for devotional habits.

Besides, there is even in the ordinary uncertainty of life, what ought to be quite enough to turn the eye upon eternity *every* day. How often we are shocked or surprised by sudden deaths, in the circle of our own acquaintance ? How often we see that no age, however promising, and no office, however important, is any absolute security against sudden death ? And now that Pestilence is in the country, how loud is the call, "Be ye also ready ?" That virulent disease leaves neither time nor power for clearing up doubtful conversions, or for healing backslidings. Its victims must go into eternity in the *dark*, if it find them unprepared or ill prepared. It gives no space for repentance, and no intervals for prayer. As the tree stands it must fall, and as it falls it must lie, beneath the stroke of this axe ! Those only are prepared for this death, who are believing "unto eternal life."

## No. VII.

## ETERNITY REALIZED IN THE SANCTUARY.

IF Jacob could regard his anointed pillar on Bethel, as "none other than the house of God," and, therefore, as "the gate of heaven," we may well and easily recognise in the Christian sanctuary, the gate of heaven; for its oracles and ordinances reveal far more of heaven than the vision of the mystic ladder did, and are far more calculated to make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. We, indeed, see no angels ascending or descending in the house of God; but we have, in its lively oracles and expressive ordinances, what is more instructive than any vision of *silent* angels could be; for Jacob's angels were all silent on Bethel. God, indeed, spake to him there; but, how little, compared with our ample volume of revelation.

It is quite needless to contrast farther our "gate of heaven," with that on Bethel: it is, however, very necessary to compare our own views and feelings towards the sanctuary, with those of Jacob; for, if he loved and revered Bethel, as a pledge and prelude of the heavenly temple, it surely becomes us to imitate him in our Zion. It is more like heaven, and more linked to it, than any anointed pillar on a bleak mountain could be, however consecrated. When the ministers of the sanctuary affirm this fact, and, on the ground of it, enforce regular and reverential attendance on public worship, they as much proclaim what their own character and preaching ought to be, as what our character and feelings ought to be. An unholy minister never exposes himself more to contempt, than when he stands forward to assert a connexion between *his* sanctuary and heaven; and thus to enforce its claims on our regard. We both dispute and despise the claim, so far as he is concerned.

It is a very different dilemma, but still a real dilemma,

when a minister, although not unholy, has neither talents nor learning to justify at all the demands upon our attention which he puts forward in the name of the sanctuary and the Sabbath. Their claims and his are certainly not identical. We cannot acquire knowledge from an ignorant man, nor wisdom from a weak man, however good his character or his intentions may be. Indeed, the weightier the claims of the house and day of God are, the lighter are those of men,

“Who cannot teach, and will not learn;”

and yet, unfortunately, such men are most forward to mix themselves up with the divine authority of religious ordinances.

Eminently holy ministers, of inferior acquirements, never fall into this mistake, nor place themselves in this awkward dilemma. Their superior holiness renders it impossible for them to talk or think of what is owing to their office in the church. Accordingly, their only wonder is, and it is sincere, that their ministry is attended at all. Worthy men! In the godly simplicity of their hearts, they forget that there is a charm in their holy and heavenly unction, which no judicious Christian would exchange for mere eloquence or learning. Such shepherds will never be without a flock, whilst there are sheep or lambs in the fold of God, who prefer refreshment to amusement, and food to excitement. The success of men, who are lost in their message, is neither marvellous nor mysterious. Humanly speaking, it may be “a wonder unto many;” but, *divinely* speaking, it is only what might be expected.

But, whatever be the talents, the acquirements, or the piety of a minister, he places himself in a very delicate position, whenever he commends or enforces the claims of the house of God, as “the gate of heaven.” We ought, then, to hear him with great candour, and even to sympathize with him; for the question, “Is my preaching in character—is my spirit in harmony, with these high claims?”

is pressing heavily on his heart. The bare consideration, that neither his ministerial character nor spirit is in *contrast* to the heavenliness of the sanctuary, is not enough, when *this* is his theme, to maintain his usual composure! He feels through all his soul, that *words* will not prove to us, that the house of God is the gate of heaven. He is penetrated with the conviction, that assertions, however solemn, and arguments, however strong, will and must fail to imbue us with the spirit of Jacob, unless a double portion of that heavenly spirit rest upon himself. He even feels sure, that the more Zion is complimented in words, the less she will be venerated, unless his own unction illustrate her claims. Such a man, therefore, deserves both our candour and gratitude, whenever he tries to dignify or endear the sanctuary, by proving that—

“The Holy to the HOLIEST leads.”

It is, then, desirable and necessary, that our ministers should regard the house of God as the gate of heaven; and both preach and pray under a realizing sense of this sublime fact. Without the cultivation of this spirit and habit on their part, there will be a lack of spirituality on our part. It should not, however, depend chiefly on the minister, whether the ordinances and fellowship of Zion shall, or shall not, be to us, the foretastes of heaven. We have free access to all the sources, both of information and influence, which warrant or enable him to connect the church on earth with the church in heaven. Let us, therefore, familiarize ourselves, devotionally, with those scriptural views of the sanctuary, which are most heavenly; that thus we may feel its claims to love and veneration, even when he fails to plead them in demonstration of the Spirit; and that we may enjoy its ordinances when he succeeds in throwing the light of eternity upon them.

Now, it would be strange, indeed, if the house of God were not represented in the Scriptures, as the gate of heaven. It must be so—if the character of God be the

same in heaven as it is on earth. It must be so—if the first principles and final end of his worship be the same in both worlds. This is self-evident. God would not teach us on earth, what we should have to unlearn in heaven. He would not train us here, on principles which had no place there. No; we are now learning the lessons, and acquiring the character, which eternity will perfect and perpetuate. The paternal and covenant character of God in Christ, has no change to undergo, when we exchange worlds. It will be more clearly seen, and more fully enjoyed, as to degrees of light and joy, but not as to kind. God, as he is now known in Zion, will be “our God for ever and ever.”

Were there nothing to endear the sanctuary to us but this one fact, we might well regard it as the gate of heaven. No work nor wonder of nature presents the divine character in that light, in which it is seen and enjoyed in the upper sanctuary. Paternal views of God may be transferred from his house to his creation; but no scene of creation is a gate of heaven. The loveliest is too cold, and the sublimest too dark, to shadow forth “our Father,” as he is “in heaven.” This, however, the oracles and ordinances of Zion do effectually. They present God to us, in the very relation in which he stands, and will sustain for ever, towards all the redeemed spirits before his throne.

How this fact ought to dignify and endear Zion in our estimation! Its courts are more than “holy ground;” they are *heavenly* too. David understood the matter thus, when he said, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord.” He knew that His beauty there, was the same in substance as in the heaven of heavens; and, therefore, he gave a decided preference to that place where God appears likeliest to what He is and ever will be, on the throne. Let this be present to our minds, whenever we appear before God in Zion. Let us say to ourselves, as we go to his house—I

am about to contemplate God, and to commune with Him, in the very character which he will sustain through eternity. There is that in his paternal love and glory, which will for ever secure my love, and delight my soul, when all my powers are perfect and immortal. I shall never, never tire of viewing him as my father; and never, never fail to find joy unspeakable from this near and dear relationship. It will gratify and satisfy me to all eternity. Surely, then, I may well love the place where he most displays his paternal character; and well fill up the time with a theme that will fill eternity.

We may not, indeed, always enter into the spirit of this consideration, when we enter the sanctuary; but, by attempting to do so always, we shall learn a valuable lesson even when we fail. Let us, therefore, say to ourselves, when we leave the house of God without delight in his character—An eternity of this estrangement of heart from God, would be intolerable! An eternity of dark and harsh views of God would be horrible! Why should I ever entertain such views? The house of God is the gate of heaven; and, therefore, I am warranted to cherish such views of his character now, as will, when perfect, cheer me for ever. Let me not, then, indulge ideas of God, which I would not carry into heaven. Let me not think of Him now, as I shall never think of Him—

“Whilst immortality endures.”

The connexion of the house of God with the SAVIOUR, also, renders it emphatically the gate of heaven. The grand reason why nature presents no gates of heaven, is, that it gives no intimations of a Saviour. There is nothing in all the range of its most radiant glories which suggests one idea of heaven; except so far as revelation has employed them as emblems of it. Apart from that, they throw no light upon the invisible world. But the sanctuary is so founded upon Christ, and so full of express references to

him, that it is very like all that we know of heaven, both as a state, and as a place. The determination of ministers to know nothing amongst us, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified, is akin to the constancy with which saints and angels sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." The adoring humility and gratitude with which believers ascribe all their salvation to Him, are not unlike the emotions which lead all the spirits of the just to cast their crowns at his feet. The church on earth, at the sacramental supper, is not altogether unlike the church in heaven, at the marriage-supper of the Lamb. "The new song" of both churches is the same. And when the whole assembly mingle their hearts and voices in the grand hallelujah chorus of that song, there is nothing on earth so like unto heaven. There are, indeed, many and sad dissimilarities; and it would be unwise to forget them. But still, after making all the deductions which truth requires, there remains more of the aspect and spirit of heaven in Zion, than can be found in any other assembly. There is, alas, too little of the image of Christ, and less of his spirit, in his churches; but, nowhere else is there so much of either. It is, therefore, both unwise and improper to allow the imperfections, or even the spots, of the church on earth, to hide from us her relationship and resemblance to heaven. He is only "wise in his own conceit," who stands aloof from her fellowship, under the pretence that no church is pure enough for his taste. Such wilful "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," are, in general, not pure enough for the sacraments of any church, which requires *sterling* character as the condition of communion.

Besides, there are in every conscientious church a goodly number who both bear the image and breathe the spirit of Christ; who are walking humbly and circumspectly in the narrow way that leadeth to life; who are bearing their own crosses, and each other's burdens, well; and trying to live "as heirs together of the grace of life;" and these, we know, shall inherit heaven. We calculate on sitting down with

them in the kingdom of God. Why not, then, sit down with *them* here, in humble anticipation of associating with them there? In no other way can we cultivate that *kind* of Christian fellowship which prevails in heaven, and which we expect to share and reciprocate through eternal ages. And, as the Saviour will be the grand centre of that fellowship, and of all the other felicities of heaven, why not use and enjoy the sacramental pledges of them now, as preludes of eventual communion with Him, and with all who are His? This would render the house of God, emphatically, the gate of heaven to us; for nothing is so like the bliss or the business of eternity as the joint celebration of redeeming love.

The HOLINESS, also, required and promoted by the house of God, renders it both an emblem and a pledge of Heaven. There is far more similarity between the terms of communion in the church militant, and the terms of admittance into the church triumphant, than is usually noticed. It is, however, just as true that the unclean, the intemperate, and the dishonest, should be kept out, and cast out, of the church on earth, as that they shall not enter into the church in heaven. This general law is the same in both worlds. Nothing that defileth shall enter the gates of the New Jerusalem; and none who are immoral ought to be allowed to remain in the fellowship of Zion. "Purge out," says Paul, "the old leaven." 1 Cor. v. 7, 13.

Had this apostolic rule been acted upon, honestly and uniformly, there would have been less difficulty in proving that—

"The church on earth, and all the dead,  
But one communion make;"

for it requires but little candour, and less imagination, to regard a body of holy persons, as akin to "the spirits of just men made perfect." Holiness and heaven are ideas which naturally blend, and suggest each other. We never see an

eminently holy man, without thinking of heaven. We feel as sure that he belongs to it, as we should if we saw an angel. How readily and vividly, therefore, would a holy church bring before our minds that glorious church which is without spot before the throne? Well, there are churches, which, to say the least, are not unholy. Their general character is pure and peaceable. Their moral worth gives them moral weight. Their watchfulness to keep out, and to cast out, unworthy communicants, entitles them (whatever name they bear) to the respect and gratitude of all who believe that the church should be a nursery for heaven.

Do we, then, belong to a holy church? If so, how useful and delightful its character may be to us! Let us look round from Sabbath to Sabbath, and especially on sacramental Sabbaths, upon our brethren and sisters in Christ, as our eternal companions in the kingdom of God. Let us not stop at the fact, that it is creditable and pleasing to be identified with them on earth. It is, indeed, so: but this is not all the truth. That moral excellence, and evangelical spirit, which render their fellowship so gratifying, render their glory sure; and, therefore, we ought, whilst worshipping with them, to anticipate that glory, and to treat them as the heirs of it. And they, also, will regard us in the same light, if they see any good reason for believing that the love of Christ constrains us to follow holiness.

It will, also, add much to our enjoyment of the sanctuary, if we pause for a moment, whenever our hearts are in their best frame, to say unto ourselves, "This, and more than this relish and rapture, will prevail for ever, when we exchange worlds. There will be no return to folly, and no relapse into formality, when we reach heaven. There, he that is holy will be holy still; and the beauty of his holiness remain as unchangeable as the immortality of his being."

And even when the frame of our minds is dull and earth-

ly, the best thing we can do to quicken our relish for holiness is, to anticipate heaven. That, indeed, is not easily done, when the heart is not right with God. Then it seems presumption to cherish the hope of glory. If, however, we do not, and dare not, abandon that hope altogether, even then; if we still cling to it, although our soul "cleaveth to the dust," nothing is so likely to bring our spirit into harmony with it, as the distinct realization of the time, when we shall "bear the image of the heavenly," as fully as we now bear "the image of the earthy." Yes, the time, yea, the eternity, is coming, when it will be as impossible for our spirits to weary in well doing, or to lose their unction, as it is for angels to dislike heaven, or to distrust God. Thus, the due consideration of "what we shall be" hereafter, has a direct tendency to make and keep us what we ought to be here.

The mutual LOVE, also, which prevails in heaven, has its best emblems and exemplifications in the house of God. Domestic love embraces too narrow a circle, and social love is too much blended with self-love, to be types of that attachment which, like the principle of gravitation linking star to star throughout the universe, however they differ in glory, links spirit to spirit throughout heaven, without partiality and without hypocrisy. There they love each other "for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them, and shall be in them;" and because God and the Lamb love them all with a perfect love.

It is only in the church that this principle is acted on, or recognised. And, if it be too little acted on there—and, alas, it is so! still it has no power nor place in any other form of society. Cordial love to God and the Lamb, is no condition of membership, and no current claim for esteem, in any secular association of men. Neither political nor commercial bodies, as such, judge of men by their conformity to the image of God, nor by their love to the Saviour. Whilst, therefore, I would neither hide nor palliate the sad deficiency of brotherly love which prevails in our churches,

I boldly maintain that nowhere else is there any semblance of *that* love which makes heaven so lovely. Love "for the truth's sake" is disowned or overlooked in all temporal confederations. Some of these may maintain religious tests; but, in general, real personal religion is no recommendation to office, and no plea for influence in the world. It is impossible, there, to learn the spirit, the motives, or the forms of that love, which will blend and bind all heaven in eternal harmony. Except by contrast, no one was ever led to think of heaven by the aspect or the spirit of any secular assembly. But, in a church, that deserves the name, let any number of new and real converts come forward, or any number of old converts evince a new measure of piety, and both will be welcomed and loved on the single ground of their love to Christ. An accession to the church in heaven could not be more sure of a cordial welcome from saints and angels, than true penitents may be here from all whose love is worth possessing. On all the hills of Zion as on mount Sion, there is joy over one sinner that repenteth. Unless, therefore, we exclude from *meetness* for the inheritance of the saints in light, the love which unites them, we must acknowledge that the house of God is the gate of heaven; for, nowhere else is there any public recognition of the grand principle which unites that general assembly. "Receive one another, even as Christ hath received you," is a lesson not to be learned in the world.

Is this, then, a part of the *meetness* for heaven, that we are cultivating? O, are we taking our *chance* of catching the spirit of celestial love at the gates of the New Jerusalem? Why not take our chance of becoming holy there, without following holiness here? We dare not hazard our souls on that experiment. All our ideas and hopes of heaven constrain us to follow holiness. Why? If because it is declared to be necessary, so also is brotherly love. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he

that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" There is nothing said of holiness, more solemn, or heart-searching, or authoritative than this. And this is the law of the house of God, just because it is the gate of heaven. Love is no more left to be optional, or to be made a matter of convenience, than holiness is so. The one is as binding as the other; and both equally a part of meetness for heaven.

Now, it is by keeping the eternal love and fellowship of the saints in light habitually before our minds, that we shall best grow in this grace of the Spirit. Nothing is so effectual in preventing and healing breaches among brethren, as the consideration that they will be cordial friends in heaven to all eternity. A moment of this thought makes us look foolish, and feel guilty, whenever we are conscious of an unchristian temper towards a fellow heir of eternal life. Even if he is much in fault, we dare not contemplate meeting him in glory, before we forgive him.

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### No. VIII.

#### ETERNITY REALIZED AT THE SACRAMENT.

WHATEVER may be the present state of our views or feelings in regard to the sacramental supper of the Lamb, our *first* approach to his table was unfeignedly and peculiarly solemn. This was the case, whether that approach was made in much hope, or in much fear; in joy, or in doubt. If hope predominated in our minds, it did so, as it reigns in the mind of a dying Christian, who is departing "in peace;"—as solemnly as sweetly. It was as thoughtful and prayerful, as it was soothing. It was a hope "clothed with humility," and quivering with holy awe.

Even if joy predominated, it, too, was emphatically "a holy joy." Tears, rather than words, were the chief expression of it. It was as retiring as it was intense. Solitude, not publicity, was its chosen element. We were even jealous of that joy, because we felt ourselves to be utterly unworthy of it.

We remember all this well. We can never forget it, however often or much we have, since, failed to realize that state of mind. We partook of our first sacrament with much of that deep solemnity which pervades the spirit of a dying saint, when partaking of his *last* sacrament. And his solemnity is "very deep!" It both sanctions and sanctifies his application of the Saviour's words to his own case: "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new, in the kingdom of God." Accordingly, whatever be the literal meaning of these words, or the prophetic meaning of the apocalyptic "marriage-supper of the Lamb," we admire and approve his touching transition of thought, from the last sacramental-supper on earth, to his first celebration of the marriage-supper in heaven; it is, in his circumstances and spirit, so natural, appropriate, and beautiful! Indeed, this is just the way in which we wish to be exercised, when *our* last sacrament comes. We should so like!—to be able to enjoy it as the pledge and prelude of the heavenly feast; so like!—to be able to say to our friends, "I am going to drink of the fruit of the vine, new, in the kingdom of God." For, we feel that, whatever material imagery runs through such figurative language, we should not be misunderstood at that moment; and we cannot but think, that the calm and solemn utterance of such a good hope, when we are on the uttermost verge of eternity, would tend much to endear the sacrament to those members of our family who "keep the feast;" and to enforce its holy and sweet claims on those of them who neglect it.

Well; our last sacrament will come: it may come soon! And, should we know it to be our *last*, we shall feel it to

be very solemn. We shall feel, as if *light* from eternity were the covering of the table; as if a *hand* from eternity set out and served the sacred emblems; as if a *voice* from eternity uttered the welcome, "Eat, O friends: drink, O beloved;" as if *echoes* from eternity repeated the closing hymn,

"'Tis done; the great transaction's done!"

Will it be thus? Ought it to be thus, at our last sacrament? If so, there may be something, there ought to be much, of this realizing sense of eternity, at every sacrament. Any one, even the next, may be our last.

But, however many "solemn feasts" may be between us and the "marriage-supper of the Lamb," in heaven, each of them has the same connexion with heaven as the last will have. And, as the last may, from our extreme weakness, or extreme pain, be any thing but a "time of refreshing," it becomes, yea, it behooves us, to try at the next, and at every subsequent sacrament, how much we can connect it with heaven and eternity. The mind cannot, indeed, throw itself, even by an effort, so far "within the veil," as the immediate prospect and pressure of death will throw it. We cannot force such glimpses of eternity, as the approach of death forces upon us. We cannot *command* that entire and intense concentration of spirit in the house of God, which is so natural, though inevitable, in the house of mourning, at the moment the mourning begins. There, and then, without effort, and even without intention, we find ourselves absorbed with eternal things. The departure of one spirit into the invisible world, displaces, for a time, this world, in all the spirits present. The unclothed soul cannot rise more rapidly to the throne of God, even if borne on angels' wings, than the thoughts and feelings of survivors rush into the realization of meeting God. Their spirits are "naked and open," too, before God, although in another sense: for, at this solemn moment they heed nothing, and hear nothing of all that is "under the sun."

On such occasions, the soul asserts its own immortality, and springs at once into its own element, in spite of all the temporal considerations which may be around it. Neither grief nor gain can materialize it, for a time. Its freedom and force may not last long; but there is an immortal energy about them, for a little, that makes the body feel that its limits are too narrow, and its breathing too slow, for the full action of a fully *conscious* spirit.

When we come from such a scene to the first sacrament after it, this absorbing consciousness of our immortality, although softened and tranquilized by the interval, is yet so vital and vivid, that it gives to that sacrament much of the aspect of a last one. Deep thoughts of our own death, mingle with our sweetest recollections of the Saviour's death. We communicate for eternity. There is an *air* of eternity about the sanctuary, and about ourselves too. Our sympathizing friends feel the "*unction*," as well as the weight, that is on our spirit. For it is not their sense of our *loss* alone, that so readily and fully harmonizes their looks and tones with our own, when they meet us for the first time, after we come from the house of mourning to the house of God. That holy and solemn awe which breathes in all their manner towards us, is chiefly derived *from* us. They feel that we have been so near the eternal world, that any thing not solemn, would be as unkind to our seriousness as to our sorrow. They know that we went so far down into "the swellings of Jordan," with the spirit which so recently passed through them, that they look as if they saw drops of the cold and dark waters still hanging upon us. And we, too, feel, however soothed or reconciled, that it would be a kind of sacrilege even to smile, for a time.

These familiar facts prove, not that it is possible, or even desirable, to communicate in this spirit always; but that it is possible, and therefore desirable, to cultivate so much of a realizing sense of eternity, that each sacrament may have an express reference to it. And this, each may have, as

well the last, without at all overcasting or overstraining the mind. Our *first* did neither; and yet it was very solemn.

The form of these remarks is very defective, or the design of them is sadly misunderstood, if they seem to inculcate the necessity or the desirableness of an *habitual* awe on the spirit, equal to that we have just contemplated. The spirit could not sustain such a load long. It would "fail" under the strain and pressure of habitual concentration. Indeed, any concentration of its thoughts and feelings, which would unfit us for the ordinary duties of life and godliness, is to be deprecated. We were not made, nor yet redeemed, for *thinking* only, nor for *feeling* only. Thinking deeply, for the sake of thought; or feeling deeply, for the sake of emotion, is oftener a "lust of the mind," than a grace of the Holy Spirit. And, in the case of that, almost, convulsive excitement, which is produced by the shock, or the fear, of death, there is little or no *religion* in it. It takes place, in almost all its forms and force, where there is no religion at all. Even some of our domestic animals, are overwhelmed by the loss of their young.

Nothing, therefore, can be farther from my design, than to represent "the power of godliness," as an overpowering emotion, or even as powerful excitement. Indeed, one grand feature of it is—power *over* all excess both of thought and feeling. The foregoing references to our final sacrament, and to the first one after bereavement, are intended, therefore, not to bring up, at every sacrament, all the feelings peculiar to these extraordinary occasions; but to bring *out* of that chaos of feeling, the light of eternity which pervades it; and to embody the light in an orb, which shall shine as calmly, and constantly, and brightly, on the sacramental table, as the lamps of the temple shone on the altars of sacrifice and incense. For it is possible, and desirable, and safe, to have such an habitual sense of eternity, as shall render every sacrament a foretaste of the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Each is both intended and adapted to be so, by God; and, therefore, should be received as such by us.

In like manner, nothing is farther from my intention than to give a mystical, or superstitious, or undue importance to the act of communicating, or to the sacrament itself. Any thought, however profound, and any feeling, however spiritual, which *terminates* on the symbols or the ceremony, is far from blameless. The sacrament, and the sacramental act, are nothing, but as they bring the soul near to the Saviour, and bind it to holiness. Like the Bethel ladder, they are beautiful in their simplicity of form, and sublime in their suitableness of place; but it is "*the Lord standing above*" them, that is their real glory; as their tendency to lead to Him, is their real use. This must never be forgotten. We have done nothing in religion, and nothing that is truly spiritual, when we have broken bread, and drank wine, in the sanctuary; however deep may have been the silence, and however decorous the solemnity, with which this has been done; unless that deep silence was the expression of deep humility, and that solemnity the effect of communing with God and the Lamb.

We should never hesitate to acknowledge nor to proclaim this, whatever use some may make of the concession. It may be turned against the necessity of the sacrament. Those who deny the permanency of its obligation, as a Christian ordinance, may argue, that they can commune with God and the Saviour, as well without it. This is, however, but mere assertion, founded on gratuitous assumption; for, as they have never tried the experiment of communing with God *with* it, they are not qualified to judge. They are, of course, both competent and good judges of their own communion with God *without* it; but, certainly, not of ours *with* it. They are as ignorant of how far our enjoyment exceeds their own, as we are of how far their enjoyment falls short of ours. Perhaps, a *little* more ignorant; for we have some experience both of the kind and degree of fellowship with God, which is enjoyed without the sacrament: whereas they have none of the kind or the degree which is peculiar *with* it.

Having thus guarded against misunderstandings, let us look fairly and fully in the face of the question. How, and how much, may the light of eternity be brought and kept upon the holy sacrament? We have seen that death, and the fear of death, can actually enshrine it with much of the glory, and with more of the solemnities, of eternity. And we remember, that, when we have come from the tomb to the table, we have communicated in "a right spirit." And, as we felt then, and feel still, that we were not *too* serious, nor *too* prayerful, even then; we are bound by consistency, to meet the question—How far can we communicate habitually for eternity?

Now, do not imagine nor suspect, that this question is intended or calculated, to bring in any *new* principle, or *new* feeling, into your sacramental devotion. Its real and sole design is, to purify that devotion, by making the usual train of thoughts and feelings flow more freely on the channels of eternity, and set in more directly to the shores of immortality. And as, at each successive sacrament, we ourselves are nearer and nearer to the invisible world, it is, surely, neither unnatural nor unreasonable, that our reflections and emotions should advance in their intimacy with it. Our bodies are for ever growing liker and liker to the mortality that awaits them: and our spirits ought to assimilate more and more to the immortality that awaits them.

Now, it is not difficult to realize the *manner* in which we should celebrate the love of Christ in heaven. The moment we think of "sitting down" at the feast there, in the immediate and unveiled presence of the Master of the feast; and next to the spirits we love; and near to the whole "general assembly" of saints and angels—we feel at once that we should take our place with great solemnity, and occupy it with holy awe, and employ it for holy purposes. Not a look nor motion would be out of *character* with the scene or the service. We should be afraid to glance even at the whole landscape of Paradise, lest it should divert us, for a moment, from gazing upon the Lamb in the midst of the

throne, or from swelling the chorus of the new song. All levity, and listlessness, and vacancy, and the very appearance of them too, would be as much avoided as sleep or irreverence. And, is not more of this reverential manner as possible, as it is desirable, at the sacramental feast on earth? Would it not promote all the spiritual purposes of communicating, and improve its spirit too, to place ourselves, in thought, at the table above, until we felt that the table below was on "holy ground," and worthy of the most solemn deportment? This would prevent all postures, and motions, and looks, which tend to deaden our own minds, or to disturb others.

In like manner, it is not very difficult to realize the *spirit* in which we should "keep the feast" in heaven. We do, occasionally, catch a glimpse of the warm emotions which the first welcome into heaven, the first sight of heaven, the first access to the throne of heaven, will awaken! We have some conception of the mighty burst of mingled wonder, gratitude, and humility, which will be called forth, by finding ourselves there! Even our resolution is already taken, that no spirit who has preceded us at the throne, and none who follow us, shall be more humble or grateful. We are quite sure that we shall prostrate ourselves and our crowns, as low as the lowliest; and employ our harps as cordially and constantly, as any spirit in the general assembly of perfect spirits.

These intentions and anticipations are occasionally present to our minds, during our solitary walks, and when we are musing or praying in our closets. Even when surrounded by our families at home, fond hope will, now and then, dart off to heaven, with *them* in her arms, and go through all the glorious act of presenting them safe and spotless before the throne, with exceeding joy!

Thus we can, we do, realize "the glorious things," at times, and in places, where there is not so much to suggest the idea of them, or to assist us in realizing them, as there is in the sanctuary and at the sacrament. Why not, then, before taking our place at the table of the Lord, place our-

selves in thought at the throne of the Lord, until we see and feel the *kind* of penitence, and the *kind* of humility, and the *kind* of gratitude, and the *kind* of love, which becomes those who take "the cup of blessing" on earth, as the pledge of "the cup of salvation" in heaven? No process nor direction of thought would so readily improve "a right spirit," or correct a wrong spirit. Indeed, it is only by some process akin to this, that we can succeed in securing a sacramental spirit: for it will not be *forced*. All attempts to throw out vain thoughts, or to throw off bad feelings, by dint of mere effort, almost defeat themselves. These things can only be displaced by heavenly things. Whilst Abraham only "drove away the fowls" that alighted on his sacrifice, "a horror of great darkness" was upon him; but, when he saw the fire of heaven, like "a burning lamp," upon the altar, he was able to renew his covenant with God. So it is with us. Whilst we are merely *driving away* "the unclean birds," which haunt the cage of the heart, there is only hurry, or confusion, or pain of heart. We are almost glad to avoid thinking altogether, that we may not run the risk of falling into trains of vain thoughts. We sometimes suppress our very breathing, that we may suppress the wanderings of our minds; and we even try to create an utter vacuum in our spirit, in the hope that the Spirit of God will fill it with holy ideas and emotions.

Now, although these struggles between the flesh and the spirit, at the sacrament, tell a sad tale, and betray humiliating secrets, concerning both the neglect of due preparation, and the want of habitual watchfulness; they show, also, that we have much to learn on the subject of that "all diligence," by which the heart may be kept right with God. One part of that diligence is, the habit of looking at "the things which are eternal." They must be brought *into* our minds, if "the things which are temporal" are to be driven *out* of our minds, whilst we commemorate the death of Christ. And, how much easier and pleasanter it is, instead of a feverish or confused effort to be solemn and devout,

just because we *ought* to be so, to have recourse, at once, to the contemplation of an eternity that can *make* us so! Eternal redemption—eternal love—eternal life—are objects which cannot fail to dislodge vain thoughts, nor to quicken dull feelings, if any due measure of attention and prayer be given to them.

In like manner, it is not difficult to realize the *purpose* for which we should keep the feast in heaven. For, were it possible to pass within the veil of that temple “once every year,” or even once in the course of our life, and to remain as long as the high-priest did in the holy of holies; and then to return to the earth, not at all unfitted for the ordinary duties of life, nor at all insensible to the real worth and claims of human affairs; we see, at a glance, that we should make all the enjoyment of this visit to the “third heavens,” bear upon practical holiness for ever after. We feel, that, if it were put to us, whilst within the veil, what we should choose to bring down from heaven, as most useful on earth, and most conducive to promote our final meetness for “eternal inheritance,” we should fix upon the grace which would enable us “to pass unspotted through the world.” This, after having seen God’s “holy hill,” we should prefer to a crown of glory, or a harp of gold, when we had to *return* to the work and warfare of faith, in this world. Indeed, no fruit, “of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God,” would be preferred to that, which would fortify us to do and endure the will of God well. Or, if we did feel any longing to bring down something, which should attract public notice by its splendour, or feed self-complacency by its singularity, we should blush for ourselves, and flee from the vain desire, “as from a serpent.”

Now, even by this brief look at “eternal things,” we have caught a glimpse of the practical purpose of sacramental communion, which is just as *sober*, as the point from which it is gained is fanciful. That which we would thus bring from the table in heaven, we ought to *seek*, chiefly, at the table

on earth ;—firmness to resist temptation, and fortitude to bear our trials.

At the hazard of being charged with repetition, but with the hope that it will not be “vain repetition,” I renew my appeals on the subject of “brotherly love.” The want or the weakness of this grace, is one great cause of the want of sensible enjoyment at the sacrament. Towards some, whom God loves, we have no love that is worth mentioning ; and, towards others, we have hardly good-will. We have been offended, perhaps injured, by a few ; and although we forgive, we do not forget ; but take care that they shall know, if not feel too, that we *remember* them. Now, we could not remember them in this way, were their souls and our souls to meet at the marriage-supper of the Lamb, in heaven. There, we should feel as much ashamed of our former high spirit, as they would of their former mean spirit. Neither party could bear an apology nor a confession from the other, before the throne. The bare idea of recrimination, or even of mutual explanations, there, is intolerable ! We feel, instinctively, that all unpleasant recollections would be for ever lost, in the rapture of meeting to part no more.

Now, although it is not necessary to bring all this heavenly temper to bear upon earthly fellowship, it is necessary that personal offences, which do not *unchristianize* the offender, should not subject him to unchristian treatment. He ought not to be treated as innocent, if he has done wrong ; but, if the wrong do not *disprove* all his pretensions to piety, he must not be treated as an “alien.” Consider ! he may for ever sit *next* to you in heaven.

## No. IX.

## ETERNITY REALIZED AT HOME.

BOTH the manner and degree in which the habits and happiness of domestic life may be improved by the mutual hope of eternal life, deserve the serious attention of all husbands and wives who are "heirs together of the grace of life." No fastidious delicacy, nor dread of singularity, should be allowed to prevent them from thinking or speaking of their eternal prospects, exactly as God has spoken. No length of time, during which we have been *silent* on this subject, should deter us from familiarizing ourselves with it. "The mighty God, the Lord, hath spoken," freely and frequently, upon it; and, as he never speaks without occasion, nor without design, on any subject, we may be sure that his reasons are weighty when he speaks of marriage.

Now, God has expressly said, that "marriage is honourable; and, accordingly, he himself signally honours it, by making it the emblem of his own love to believers, and of their union to Him. "I am married unto thee," was the frequent and emphatic language of God to his ancient church. Nor is this emblem less employed in the case of the Christian church. Her union to Christ is represented as conjugal. Even in heaven, her name is "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." Thus signally does God honour the relationship, which he calls "honourable."

It may be criticism to say, "that it is the *poverty* of human language which gives rise to the use of such emblems." It is, however, sense, as well as piety, to say, that the riches of divine grace require the use of them. It may be philosophical to regard them as accommodations to the weakness of our minds. It is, however, wisdom to regard them as accommodated to the strength of redeeming love in the eternal mind. Such metaphors have, indeed, reasons in

both our mental and moral weakness ; but their chief reasons are in the manifold wisdom and grace of God. And one of them is—to exalt and endear the marriage union itself, by throwing around it the charms of a better paradise than that in which it originated. All the divine arrangements and declarations on the subject of marriage, have an express and splendid reference to ETERNITY. The conjugal union is made the emblem of all the grace which gives a title to eternal life, just that husbands and wives may live and love now, “as being heirs together of the grace of life.” Their mutual hope of dwelling together in heaven, is made the grand motive and rule of their dwelling together in harmony on earth. The strong and lovely motive is in no wise weakened or dimmed by the fact, that “in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage.” The same high authority which reveals this fact, declares that “they are equal unto the angels;” a consideration quite sufficient to inspire the most exalted expectations of mutual recognition and enjoyment. Angels are not unacquainted with, nor indifferent to, each other. Both their love and fellowship are perfect. It is impossible to form a higher or a holier idea of mutual happiness, than their union and communion before the throne ; and, therefore, to be “equal unto the angels” in heaven, is the very perfection of social felicity and personal glory.

It is, then, the revealed fact, that pious husbands and wives shall be like the angels of God in heaven. This is our joint heritage there, who are joint heirs of salvation here. “Equal unto the angels !”—Surely, this prospect deserves to be greeted with something more grave than a *smile*. It is not visionary nor fanciful. It is a leading and everlasting feature of the heavenly constitution. It is an actual and prominent part of that “life and immortality, which Jesus Christ brought to light, through the gospel;” and, therefore, any appearance of levity or indifference towards it, is inconsistent with our habitual veneration for our Lord and Saviour, as “the faithful and true witness.” There is,

I am aware, no disrespect, towards Him or His word, intended, by the smile which usually awaits this subject. A tear would, however, be a more appropriate tribute to the *moral* aspect of the subject; for, how few partners act up to the prospect of being eternally "equal unto the angels?" Even the most amiable and exemplary are not, always, to each other, exactly "that manner of persons" which *they* ought to be, and might be, who "look for such things" as angelic union and communion in heaven. And, if those who live and love most as heirs together of the grace of life, feel reproved by this prospect, what a reproof it administers to those who neither live nor love so well, as even some do who make no pretensions to religion? Their mutual hope of eternal harmony cannot be very bright, who live in discord. The idea of being for ever, or even ever, like the angels of God in heaven, cannot occur often to the contentious, or the capricious. It does not occur so often to the considerate and affectionate, as it ought to do.

This is held to be a very delicate subject. Why it should be reckoned so, is not very evident. Domestic habits and tempers are treated with equal freedom and frequency by the Scriptures; and it is matter of universal experience, although not of general acknowledgment, that domestic happiness depends more upon *temper* than upon talents or wealth. Were, however, the proverb, that "temper is every thing," to come into general use, it could not create all the good temper which domestic happiness requires. It would, of course, be very useful, as a check upon passion and peevishness; but there is no *charm* in it, to sanctify or soften the heart. It is a good law in itself, but it brings with it no new *power* of obedience. This, however, all the Christian laws of domestic life do bring with them. They inspire to the duties they prescribe.

This is a peculiarity of Christianity which is not sufficiently appreciated or noticed. There is a delicacy, a tenderness, "a small, still voice," in the family code of the New Testament, which is heart-touching; and thus trans-

forming in its sweet influence. Look and listen again to that great commandment, upon which all "the law of the house" hangs; "DWELL, as being heirs together of the grace of life." This appeal is irresistible, when fairly weighed. There is a point, a charm, an indescribable something, about the letter and spirit of it, which tells more than ten thousand prudential or authoritative maxims could. The moment it is proposed as a rule to joint heirs of salvation, it is approved by them; and, as soon as it is considered, it appears, like a summer rainbow, a bow of peace, encircling and enshrining the whole round of domestic duties.

Illustration is, however, more wanted than eulogium, on this subject. Now, it deserves our special notice, that God, in giving laws to believing partners, never urges mutual love or peace by the prospect of *death*. We are, indeed, "heirs together" of the sentence of death; and there is much in our mutual mortality to commend and enforce mutual kindness. We cannot live together long. The term of our union may be very short. And, as unkindness and neglect are fearfully avenged, by the upbraidings of conscience, when death does come, we do well to prepare a good conscience for the solemn occasion. Death is not allowed, however, to appear at all in the appeal which God makes to our hearts on behalf of the domestic virtues. 'The whole motive is drawn from eternal life; and is so "full of glory," that it fills up "the valley of the shadow of death" with brightness. We must, indeed, die, in order to inherit the kingdom of God; but, still, it is the kingdom of God, and not the kingdom of death, which is placed and kept before our minds.

This is not by accident, nor without design. 'The Searcher of hearts, who knoweth our frame, knows that we, of all persons, are most averse to contemplate death; and, therefore, in order that we may have no excuse for not thinking of heaven, He founds his appeals to us, not on our mortality, but entirely on our immortality; that, thus, death might be "swallowed up in victory." This is as wise as it is

kind. It is the only way to conquer *parental* fears of death. Moral maxims, however just—and direct warnings, however solemn—could not win us to the habitual considerations of our latter end, whilst our children are young. The degree of warning, that would compel us to number our days, would soon shorten our days, or unfit us for our duties ; and thus defeat its own purpose. It is not, therefore, by warnings, nor by plying us with motives, derived from the shortness of life, or the solemnity of death, that God enforces our conjugal and parental duties. We are not brought “unto the mount that burned with fire ; nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest ; nor unto the sound of a trumpet,” to hear the law of our mortality, or the law of our relationship ; but we are brought to hear both sounding from “Mount Sion,” the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ; where “an innumerable company of angels” await our coming ; and Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, preserves our prepared place for us. Truly our law, Christian parents ! is “ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator.”

Were these facts as familiar to us as they are scriptural, we could not be so much in bondage to the fear of death, nor so silent about our hope of heaven. But they are not familiar : and the consequence is, there is little or no sweet counsel between husbands and wives on the subject. In general, heaven is almost as seldom realized or referred to as death. So unusual is any conversation on the point, that even a question about heaven, unless a *curious* one, would be reckoned an omen or foreboding of death, rather than a symptom of heavenly-mindedness. There are very few husbands or wives, who would not be more *startled* than gratified, by an attempt, on either side, to draw on a serious conversation about their mutual prospects for eternity. Even the discovery, or the suspicion, that the thoughts of either party were dwelling much upon heaven, would be interpreted into a sign that that party was “not long for this world.” Thus the manifestation of heavenly-mindedness is rather

dreaded than desired, even by pious partners ; because they have fallen into the habit of regarding it as the forerunner of death.

And, is it not so ? Is it not become almost proverbial to say, of those who begin to dwell much on heavenly things, "*that they are too ripe for glory to be long here.*" And do not observation and experience, thus, give some countenance to the suspicion ? I answer, at once,—none at all. The facts on which such questions are founded, are gathered from wrong quarters. They occur amongst aged, or very delicate Christians, whose many infirmities cannot be well sustained without much of the hope of eternal life ; and, therefore, such facts prove nothing that is really applicable to the great majority of married believers. Wherever heavenly-mindedness seems an *omen* of approaching death, there are other omens indicating and hastening that approach. It is, therefore, not fair, to attribute an ominous character or aspect to the habit of looking to the things which are "unseen and eternal." Paul's confidence of life was strongest, at the very time when his heavenly-mindedness was the greatest. "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ; which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And, having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith." Phil. i. 23. This case, although apostolic, is not unapplicable to Christian parents. Whilst God sees it to be really "more needful," for the sake of our children, that we should "abide" with them, the cultivation of a "desire to depart and to be with Christ," will no more hasten our departure than it did Paul's ; but will, in fact, best qualify us for the "furtherance" of our children, in whatever is good for them. Besides, the natural tendency of that heavenly-mindedness which God inculcates, is, to promote health, and to prolong life. A hope full of immortality, is full of tranquillity and cheerfulness ; and thus favourable to the body as well as to the mind. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth

many days, that he may see good?" Every pious husband. Then, "ye husbands, dwell with your wives, according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life. Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; and let your adorning be, the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptibility of a meek and quiet spirit,—which is, in the sight of God, of great price." Ye are both to be "equal unto the angels" in heaven; be not, therefore, *unlike* them, whilst you remain on earth.

"This view of the matter," it may be said, "is certainly very pleasing; but, as the hope of eternal life is not common nor constant, even amongst truly pious partners, how can it become a general principle of feeling or conduct?" Now, I readily grant, that if it were brought forward to set aside the use of other revealed principles or rules of domestic life, this would be a formidable objection. It is, however, advanced here, as it is in the Word of God, not to supersede any divine law, or natural affection, but to hallow all the former, and to sanctify all the latter. And, surely, if neither the frequent weakness, nor yet the occasional absence of the hope of eternal life, is found to set aside the use of our ordinary motives, the predominance of that hope is not likely to do so. If many good principles remain firm without much of it, more of it, is not calculated to relax them.

It is, however, very much doubted, whether such an habitual hope of heaven, as would habitually influence domestic life, be attainable by the generality of godly parents and partners. Many of both are quite of opinion that, whilst they have so little leisure, and so much care, they cannot reach the privilege of reading their

"Title clear,  
To mansions in the skies."

And in this way we all reason, more or less. Indeed,

it is with considerable difficulty that any one learns to suspect, even in secret, the hollowness of such reasoning; it is so plausible in appearance. Nothing seems more natural, or likely to be true, than that much time and little worldly care must be necessary, in order to acquire a bright and abiding hope of heaven. Nothing, however, is more *untrue* than this natural supposition. All the oracles of God contradict it; and no wonder! Ours is not a world in which much leisure time can be commanded; nor in which cares can be avoided; and, therefore, the gospel would ill accredit its own name or pretensions, if the hope of eternal life, which is its first promise, as well as its final reward, could not be enjoyed by those believers who have much to do and endure. The gospel is, therefore, misunderstood, so far, by all who imagine that their public duties, or their domestic cares, place them afar off from a lively hope of glory. It is just because we have so much to do and to suffer, as well as because it cannot be merited, that eternal life is the free gift, and the faithful promise of God, to believers; so that what we put forward as our reason for not venturing to cherish the hope of heaven, is actually one of God's reasons for making it as free as it is fair. Unless, therefore, a believing husband is doing something in his business, that is wrong; or his believing wife doing something in her family, that is imprudent; why should they not abound in hope? Their duties warrant, not forbid it. Their ultimate design in doing so much for their children is, that they too may choose the way to heaven: and, therefore, it would be *strange*, indeed, if such parental efforts were hinderances to parental anticipations of heaven. Those who regard family duties in this strange light, must have very unscriptural notions of both godliness and glory. There is, however, quite as much of that holiness, which constitutes *meekness* "for the inheritance of the saints," in providing for and bringing up a family in the fear of God, as in any other virtue of Christian character.

All these distinctions and explanations will not, how-

ever, remove the difficulty we naturally feel, unless we understand the gospel itself well. The pious husband or wife, who does not believe that "he that believeth in Christ *hath* eternal life," will not be able to keep up the hope of heaven. It will be thrown down or dimmed by every accident, and by all the fluctuations of their spirits and feelings. Indeed, it will *fall* down of itself, until it take its final stand on the promise of God through Jesus Christ. Now, he has promised eternal life unto them who rely on the cross for a holy salvation; and, therefore, it is just as much our duty to take the full comfort of the promise, as it is to give the cross our full confidence. Not even the plagues of our hearts, which we so often feel, and so deeply lament, must be allowed to prevent this duty of hoping unto the end. Giving up hope is, in fact, giving them head. If Satan succeed in his efforts to make us afraid of cherishing a good hope through grace, we shall soon settle into a worse frame than any we now deplore. The more, therefore, that we feel and fear the plagues of our hearts, the more reason we have to cling both to the cross and the crown; for all that is bad will only become worse, if we lose or lessen our hold upon either.

If these hints throw any light on the general subject of this Essay, they now warrant the question—why should not mutual heirs of the grace of life speak freely and frequently to each other of their eternal prospects? These prospects are not gloomy in their aspect, nor precarious in their tenure. It is true,

"Death like a narrow sea divides  
That heavenly land from ours;"

but that sea is both bridged and brilliant to us, with the great and precious promises. Or, if we cannot yet realize it in this light, *silence* is not the best way to surmount our fears of death. These, like other fears, strengthen by concealment and lessen by disclosure. Why not, then, discuss them as well as we do others! Why so much reserve, and shame, and timidity, on the subject of our mutual immor-

tality? We are not indifferent to each other's final safety. Neither of us could bear the idea of *parting* in silence. Whichever may be the survivor, the utterance of a good hope will be anxiously looked for then. Consider this: we may be *unable* to utter the wished for "All is well," on our death-bed. And, therefore, if we prolong our present silence, we are risking each other's comfort at a moment when there is no such balm to the widowed and the wounded heart, as is the dying assurance of peace. O! let not the flow of that healing balm depend upon the vicissitudes of mortal pain! Let it drop in the garden of home now, and be treasured up "against that day."

Still, we shrink from *speaking* "as being heirs together of the grace of life." Why is this? Are we *not* joint heirs of salvation? Do we "stand in doubt" of each other? If not, what are we afraid of? Say not, "who must begin this unusual kind of communion?" Any *formal* effort to introduce it would prevent it. It must not be attempted as a task. Whoever is the first to break the ice on this subject, must not *seem* to be conscious that there is any ice to break. Family prayer is the best medium for introducing family hopes. The regular introduction, and the gradual amplification, of the apostolic thanksgiving, 1 Pet. i. 3, in prayer, would pave the way for conversation. For, what we often and openly united to say unto God, we should soon be able to say unto each other.

These remarks proceed on the assumption, that God is favourable to the domestic happiness of them who fear him, and solicitous to promote it. And this is the revealed fact. He looks with no unfriendly or jealous eye upon a happy home; nor considers time mispent, or religion misapplied, in multiplying *in-door* comforts. The family bliss which he breaks up so often by the strokes of his providence, and of which we are in the habit of saying, "it is too good to last long," is not the happiness now referred to. It is of life, health, and temporal prosperity, we speak thus; and these are precarious in every family, however the heads of it may

feel or act together. No maxim, however good or well applied, can secure exemption from all domestic calamity. But the happiness which depends on mutual love, mutual tenderness, and mutual confidence, may be secured by living together as joint heirs of eternal life.

Now, there must be some favourable light in which pious husbands and wives view each other; and some leading reason to influence their mutual conduct; and, therefore, the most *endearing* light, and the *strongest* reason, should be frequently, indeed habitually, before their minds. And, what so endearing and dignifying as being called FELLOW-HEIRS of salvation? It is not underrating any personal or relative charm, on either side, to affirm, that "a good hope through grace" eclipses them all; and is the best, indeed the only, permanent security, of all that is moral or amiable in the character. It ought, therefore, to be often referred to, and always acted upon, as the chief endearment of domestic life. But, is there not reason to fear, that it is too seldom and slightly noticed, even by pious partners? It is not intended to insinuate, by this question, that they are insensible to the value or the charm of each other's piety. No; they never think of it without pleasure and gratitude. But it may be questioned, whether we think of it so often as it deserves and demands. For, what is the fact, when husband and wife are possessors of "like precious faith?" They are warranted to reflect thus: "The object of my choice is chosen of God; is one for whom the Lamb died, and ever lives to intercede; one enlightened and renewed by the Holy Spirit: one to whom angels minister on earth, and for whom a crown of glory is laid up in heaven!" This is nothing more than the fact, translated into language: but, what a different effect this view of it has upon the heart, compared with the common-place emotion excited by the reflection—he is a *good man*—she is a *good woman*? Even the more spirited reflection, "he or she is a *Christian*, if ever there was one," is not so inspiring as viewing each other as heirs together of the grace of life. The consid-

eration, in this sublime form, carries away the mind at once to the grace of the Father in adopting; to the love of the Son in redeeming; to the power of the Spirit in converting the persons; and thus raises them, in each other's estimation, to a rank and importance equally high and holy! And while they realize each other's state before God, in this glorious light, what will they not *do* and *suffer* for each other? The bright consciousness of being "one in Christ Jesus," would not dim its lustre by an unkind word or look. Caprice, peevishness, and all the natural ebullitions of temper, if they should at times rush to the lips, would rush back, ashamed of themselves, as unseemly, and inconsistent with the mutual hope of eternal life.

Now, if the ordinary ties and attractions and endearments of domestic life, often fail to maintain uniform kindness and harmony—if even vague and occasional views of each other, as Christians, fail to carry husband and wife *calmly* through the duties and trials of home; and if the higher view would evidently have a happier influence, both duty and interest call for an immediate attention to the apostolic maxim—"Dwell, as being heirs together of the grace of life."

The maxim is equally important on other accounts. It is the only principle on which husband and wife can imbibe, or maintain the spirit of *Christian fellowship*. Now a free interchange of spiritual joys and sorrows is a rare thing in domestic life. There is often far more reserve, silence, and timidity, between man and wife, on this subject, than between each of them and their pious friends. Ministers often know more of the mind of both, than *they* know of each other's experience. And this happens where there is no want of mutual confidence; even where the parties think highly of each other's piety. But, having never ventured to unbosom themselves freely upon this one point, the state of their souls before God becomes almost an inviolate *secret* at home. They thus suffer and enjoy in silence; although they have no particular reason for being

silent, except that they cannot break through the habit of reserve. This is one of the bad effects of overlooking the apostolic maxim at the outset of domestic life : communion of spirit is prevented by the neglect. There may be fellowship of opinion—fellowship of taste, maintained by an interchange of sentiment about books and sermons and ministers : but nothing will secure fellowship of *spirit*, between man and wife, but the habit of realizing and treating each other as joint heirs with Christ. And were they, on this principle, to speak freely to each other, both when all is well, and when all is wrong within, and to consult and console as fellow-heirs of salvation, the mutual benefit would be incalculable. Accordingly, the occasional instances, when reserve has been thrown off, or forced off, during the prospect of death, or the pressure of calamity, can never be forgotten by either party. The bright glimpses which they then gave each other of their hopes, are fixed stars in their memory. The secret, although only whispered, remains an everlasting music in each mind. Now, why is it not fully disclosed, and habitually reciprocated, that their “joy might be full?”

The bearings of this maxim upon the character and success of *parental instruction*, deserves special notice. For, how can religion be endeared to children by formal lessons, if there be no familiarity between parents in speaking of its hopes and comforts as their own? What charm or excellence can it obtain youthful credit for, if parents say nothing of the positive benefit which they themselves derive from it? Our children hear us speak freely and frequently of whatever else interests us deeply; and we feel it to be a sacred duty to prove to them, from the case of *others*, the value and necessity of piety : but, why not prove this to them from *our own* case and experience? This appeal would be more powerful. For, parents living and conversing together as joint heirs of eternal life, would thus give an effect to domestic instruction, which, as it could only be exceeded by the work of the Eternal Spirit, would be likely to secure his blessing.

Domestic *afflictions* likewise call for the use of this maxim. We are all liable to interruptions of health; and when they are long, fatiguing, and expensive, ordinary motives will not maintain that uniform patience, tenderness, and attentions, which are so requisite. But he, or she, who ministers to an heir, a joint heir of glory, will not weary in well-doing. That is a charm which, by not decaying itself, preserves from decay all the kindly feelings of nature and grace; and makes the watcher in the solitary sick chamber feel akin to the angels of God; "for, are they not all ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation?" The task of long watching and much serving may seem intolerable to others, who think of the object less as an heir of glory than as a *burden*; but, in the former light, it is watching the polishing of a "living stone," destined for a high place in the temple of God; watching the culminating of a star which is to differ from other stars in glory; watching the refining of gold that is to form part of the mediatorial crown.

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No. X.

CHRIST, THE GLORY OF ETERNITY.

WERE there nothing else to prove the Divinity of the Saviour, but the degree in which the happiness of heaven is represented, as flowing from his presence and glory—that one fact is fatal to Socinianism, and to every system which makes the Son inferior to the Father. It is especially fatal to the theory of the mere humanity of the Saviour; for a mere man, however highly endowed or well disposed, could not render himself the *companion*, even, of the countless myriads who shall inherit heaven; much

less could he be to each and to all the heirs of glory the eternal source and centre of their happiness. Such, however, the Lamb, in common "with God," is expressly and uniformly declared to be. To the Son, as much as to the Father, is ascribed the eternal absence of all pain in heaven. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The absence of all darkness, mental and moral, is traced to the same source. "The glory of God did lighten it; and the Lamb is the light thereof; for there shall be no night there."

In literal accordance with this view of heaven, the Saviour, in his great intercessory prayer, addressed the Father thus,—“I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.” Thus also he spoke to his disciples, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Thus Paul, also, summed up the bliss and glory which he anticipated in heaven,—“I desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.” And, “to be for ever with the Lord,” is the apostolic form of embracing and imbodying all the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Now all this is utterly incompatible with the theory of a *finite* Saviour. The mere man—of Unitarianism; and the incarnate angel of Arianism, are equally unfit to be Jehovah’s “FELLOW,” in the mighty work of filling all heaven with everlasting joy and glory. He who is “equal with God,” in the communication of that bliss, must be equal with God in his essence and resources. No finite being could so *universalize* his attentions amongst such myriads, as to gratify them all alike, even if his attentions were capable of perfecting their enjoyment.

Were there, therefore, only the legitimate inferences deducible from the single fact, that God and the Lamb are

equally the revealed source and centre of the eternal bliss of heaven, I, as a believer in immortality, should feel bound, by reason and common sense, to reject both the Unitarian and the Arian view of Christ; just because such a Christ could not be, in common with the Father, the glory of such a heaven. I might not, indeed, be able to infer so much from the fact of his companionship with God in this matter, as I now *know* from express revelation; but I should be compelled to infer from it—or, rather, I could not shut my eyes to the natural inferences which emanate from it, like light from the sun,—that Jesus must be more than man, and higher than angels. In a word, it is Trinitarianism only, that furnishes a satisfactory explanation of the fact just stated; and that fact is so interesting, that it deserves the chief place in all our meditations on eternal glory.

With what sublime simplicity and brevity Paul sums up the bliss of heaven: “so shall we be for ever with the Lord.” It would be much to “be for ever with” any one of the angels, in any part of heaven, however remote from the throne of God and the Lamb. It would be much to “be for ever with” any one of the saints, even if not within the sight or the sound of the “general assembly” before the throne. It would be much to “be for ever” *alone* on the most distant hill of immortality. It would be much to “be for ever” *any where*, out of hell. What, then, must it be, to “be for ever with the Lord?”

When you think of hell, and realize, only for a moment, the bare idea of being “for ever with” Satan and his angels; “for ever with” all the impure and impenitent spirits in the universe, you feel, through all your soul, that even eternal solitude in any other spot of the universe, would be an unspeakable mercy. You are not only ready to say, “I had rather be a door-keeper” of the house of God in heaven, for ever, “than dwell in the tents of wickedness;” but you are ready to say, I had rather spend my eternity alone, even on the very shore of the “great gulf” which divides heaven and hell, if I were allowed to be on its *heavenly* side; than

be free from torment on its infernal side ; because, on the side next to heaven, I should, at least, escape the contamination of hell. O, yes ; “ Gather not my soul with sinners ” for ever, wherever else it may be placed. Let me rather dwell for ever on the most distant and desolate star in space ; or hover for ever through the gloom of starless infinity, eternally alone, than dwell where spirits are “ unholy still, and filthy still.”

It is, then, the sober fact, that any place out of hell, and any condition not unholy, are infinitely preferable to the wrath to come. Any of the imaginary conditions we have glanced at, we would gladly accept, rather than dwell with apostate and despairing spirits ; even if there were no “ devouring fire ” in their everlasting prison. O, yes ; let the soul only “ *escape* ” from that society and scene ; and wherever it might wing its way in the regions of immensity ; whether on, or beyond, the utmost limits of creation, it would for ever “ sing of mercy,” and say, at every spot where it paused, “ the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage,” although not in heaven !

All this is, happily for believers ! impossible. It is not, however, improper, nor imprudent, to indulge the supposition, for the purpose of preparing ourselves to form a due estimate of heaven. Now, if eternal solitude would be endurable, even if in the vacant spaces of infinity, what must be the bliss of eternal society, around the throne of God and the Lamb ? If to be for ever with *one* angel or saint, at the very farthest “ borders of Emmanuel’s land,” would be “ worthy of all acceptance,” what will it be to be for ever with the “ innumerable company of angels,” and with all “ the spirits of just men made perfect ? ” If to be a doorkeeper of the heavenly temple would be joy unspeakable ; what must be the joy of being “ made kings and priests unto God ? ” And, if to be for ever with any one in heaven, would be certain and sublime happiness ; what must be the certainty and sublimity of being “ for ever

with the Lord ?” “ FOR EVER WITH THE LORD !” There is no idea of heaven dearer to the followers of Christ, than this. And all our other ideas of it, even the fondest of them, culminate and centre in seeing and being with the Saviour. Even the sweet hope of reunion with the spirits we love most, is sweetest in the form of joining them, to cast our crowns at his feet together. We feel that however high natural love may swell them, the only effect of it will be to swell higher the song, “ unto Him that loved us, and washed us in his own blood, be glory for ever.” Thus, husbands and wives, parents and children, will especially feel, when they meet before the throne ; and, just in proportion to the joy of that meeting, will be the attention, and the gratitude, and the love, it will concentrate upon the Lamb, slain for *them* !

In like manner, all the joys and glories of heaven will, and must, have a similar influence on all the redeemed ; because the whole church being equally indebted to Christ for heaven, the more glorious heaven is, the more grateful they must be to Him. “ Whom have I in heaven but thee !” is an exclamation which nothing there will stop or lessen, even when all that is within the veil is as visible as it is eternal. For, as neither the splendour of daylight, nor the softness of moonlight diverts our thoughts from the luminaries which emit them ; but rather fixes our attention on the sun that rules by day, and the moon that rules by night ; so neither the personal nor the relative enjoyments of heaven, however manifold or entrancing, can have any other tendency than to endear the Saviour. There is, therefore, as much sound logic, as sublime poetry, in that stanza :—

“ Millions of years my wondering eyes  
 Shall o'er his beauties rove ;  
 And endless ages I'll adore  
 The glories of his love !”

Communion of spirit, with the very “ Morning stars of the angelic hierarchy,” will not prevent this admiration of the

Saviour, even when they sing together from all their orbits, the wonders of creation; and explain from all their experience, the mysteries of Providence. Indeed, every note of their "descant on creation," will naturally and must inevitably, lead our minds to Christ;—"for by him were all things created, visible and invisible;" so that the more the glories of the material universe are shown or celebrated in heaven, the more we shall turn to the Son, saying, with the Father, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning, didst lay the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands." And, upon the same principle, if angels rehearse to us the history of every providential event, over which they sang "Hallelujah;" and even if the Eternal Spirit should solve the mystery of all these events, as they record them, the vast and varied theme will only, can only, increase our love to Him, whose incarnation and atonement were prepared for by the Old Testament series of these events, and rewarded by the New Testament series of providences. For, however the philosophy of nature and history may divert the mind from Christ crucified here, it will not do so there. Creation and providence, when seen in the light of eternity, will be as full of Christ, and lead as directly to Christ, as the Bible does now. As to Him, "all the prophets" give witness here; so there, every star visible from the heaven of heavens, will, like the star of Bethlehem, point to Him: and, as he is "all, and all, and Head over all things," in revelation; so, when all that infinity embraces, and all that eternity will explain, is as familiar as the flowers of the field now are, Jesus will still be all and all, and head over all, in heaven. "He must increase" for ever, however the arcana of the works of creation, and the workings of providence are laid open; and whatever be the glory of the prospects which shall dawn on the Church, when she is presented complete and spotless to the Father.

And, if the universe of being, in all its history and mystery unveiled, will be unable to divert the mind from the

adoration or the admiration of the Lamb of God, it is needless to say, that no personal, or family or social interest, will be able to do so. Whatever intimacies may be renewed or formed throughout the general assembly; and whatever delight may be derived from fellowship with angels of all orders, and saints of all ages; and whatever the degree of this holy intercourse may be, the direct tendency of the whole must be to exalt and endear the Saviour; because He is the direct *source* of the felicity.

It is, therefore, worthy of special attention, at this point of the argument, that it is by no arbitrary arrangement that the LAMB is the glory of heaven. He is not so, because he is appointed to be so; but he has been appointed because he *deserves* to be so. 'The Father has placed him only where the church would have placed him, of her own accord, if left to her own choice.

In like manner, it is not chiefly because it is law or duty, that the hearts and harps of all the redeemed will turn with adoring gratitude to the Redeemer; but because it is *natural* that they should thus centre upon Him, in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He would be enthroned with them in every heart, even if he were not "in the midst" of the eternal throne with them already; and, were there no legislative claim upon the love or gratitude of the church, she would continue the "new song," in all its compass and melody, without weariness for ever.

Such being the sober facts of the case, it is easy to see how all that will be known of the Father and the Spirit, however much it may be, must have the effect of endearing the Son. It is demonstrable, that the more God is unveiled, the more the Lamb will be admired. Indeed, the manifestation of the Father's glory, however full and clear, must manifest the glory of the Son, in the same proportion: for, He being "the brightness" of that glory, the brighter it shines, the more glorious he will appear. And, in like manner, the more the *person* of God is seen face to face, the more will the dignity of the Saviour be disclosed; be-

cause, He being "the express image" of that person, its manifestation will be his also.

This, although a delicate, is a delightful subject. We expect, or desire, to see much, and to understand more, of the divine nature. Our present ideas of it are rather dazzling, than distinct. We are even afraid to embody our conceptions of it; and shrink from stamping it with locality or shape. Even our conception of it is rather an emotion, than an image. No wonder, therefore, if we anticipate much from seeing God "as he is!" But, even this great sight will in nowise divert or divide our attention or attachment from the Saviour. No; when the veil drops, however far it descend, and however full may be the disclosure of the godhead, all the bearings of this beatific vision, on Christ, will be the demonstration that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily." As he said on earth, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father also;" so, when the Father shall show himself face to face in heaven, it will be in effect, saying, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Son also."

Nor is this all the tendency of the manifestation. Every ray of its glory, whilst it will unveil the essential glory of the Lamb, will also invest his cross with new and heightened attractions; and thus promote and prolong for ever the celebration of his atonement. For, the more that is shown of the majesty, the holiness, the justice, and the love of God, the more will and must the wonders of the cross be admired, and the manifold wisdom of it be studied by all the redeemed.

This line of argument is equally applicable to the manifestation of the person and glory of the Eternal Spirit. Nothing that he does now in sanctifying or consoling the church, diverts or divides her attention from the Saviour; but the whole bearing of spiritual operations and influences, is to "glorify Christ." Now, if this be their direct tendency, whilst they are but partially understood, and but inadequately appreciated, it is self-evident that they can have

no different effect, when they are all fully estimated in heaven. No; when all the agency of the Holy Spirit, and all the holy results of it are familiar, it will just, like the beatific vision of the Father's person and glory, enshrine the Lamb slain with proportionate effulgence.

Thus all that we know or can anticipate of heaven, tends only to confirm the revealed fact, that to "be ever with the Lord," is the very *substance* of eternal happiness. Being "ever with" the Father and the Holy Spirit, will just *demonstrate* this fact. For, let it never be forgotten, that it is the atoning work of the Son, which has brought out, into such full and harmonious display, the glories of the divine nature and character. Through no other medium could they have been so perfectly manifested. Whatever, therefore, be the degree in which God is glorified by the full development of his perfections, the Lamb furnished both the opportunity and the medium of it; and, therefore, when it is fullest and fairest, the Lamb must still be the mirror in which it shines.

Having thus endeavoured to realize some of the chief joys of being with the Lord, it will not be imprudent nor unprofitable to glance at the pleasures which must spring from witnessing his present *offices*, in heaven. We now think of his INTERCESSION with delight. We shall soon see how it is conducted. And, whatever be the manner or the spirit in which he intercedes, both will throw back our thoughts upon the lowness of our past and present estimate of it. Nothing, perhaps, will deepen our humility in heaven, more than the remembrance of our reluctance to pray, when we see how the Father "waiteth to be gracious;" and how the Son "ever liveth to intercede." We shall judge impartially then, how they ought to pray, whom we have left on earth; and, in this judging of their duty, we shall, with all the reason and conscience of our perfected spirits, condemn the formality and coldness which so often marked our own devotion. Only think!—what we must feel when we first see the Saviour rise before the throne

to intercede for those whom we have left? It is not necessary, in order to realize the effect of this act on our minds, that we should assist our thoughts now by the material imagery of a "golden censer," or of "much incense." No; the bare idea, that he "appears in the presence of God for" his people, is quite sufficient to lift up our spirits to something of that holy amazement which they must feel, when they see and hear how he pleads for his church. Such will and must be the effect of witnessing his actual intercession, that no witness of it could be unwilling to return to the earth for a time, (were a return proper in all other respects,) just to pay *due honour* to that intercession.

END OF VOL. I.

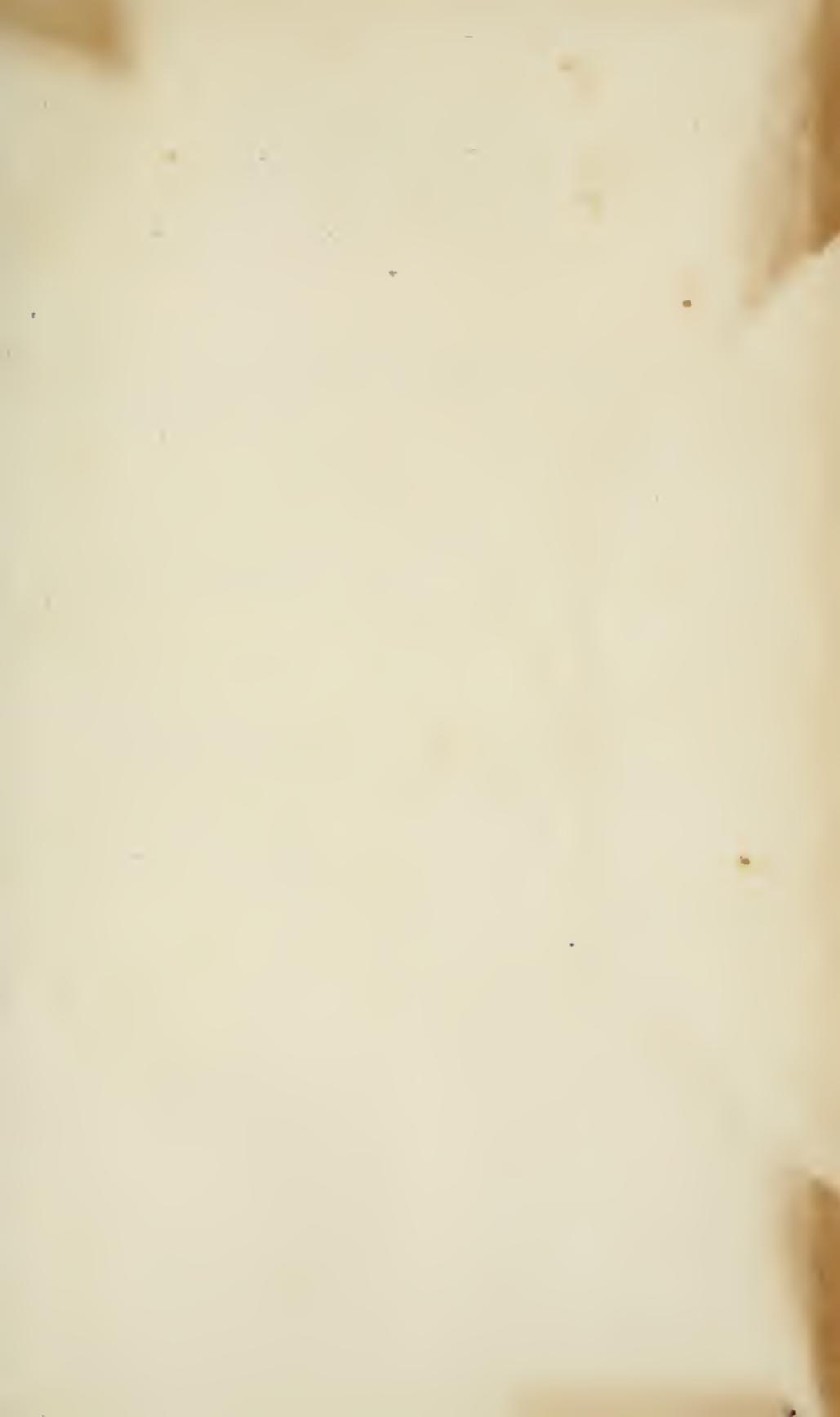


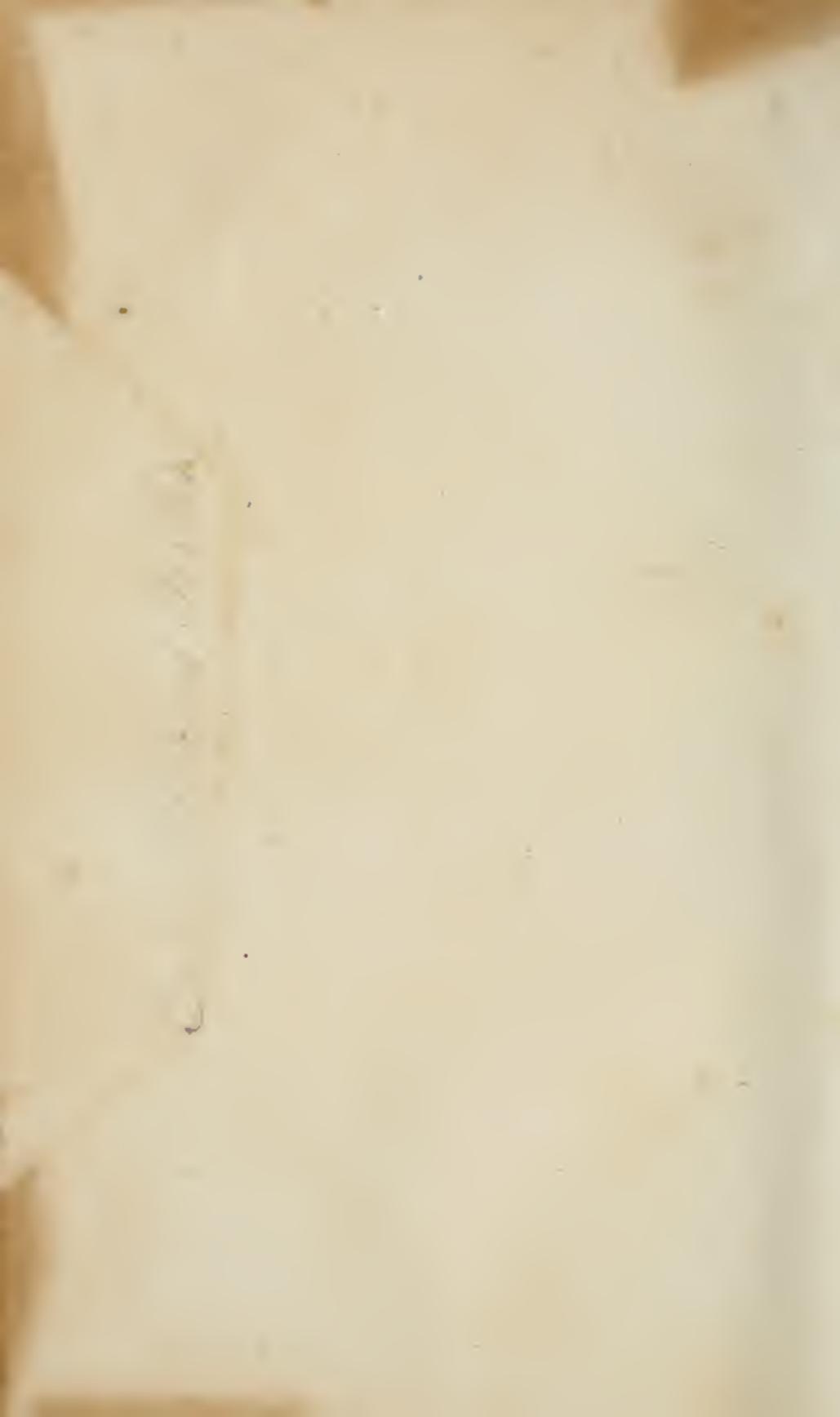












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