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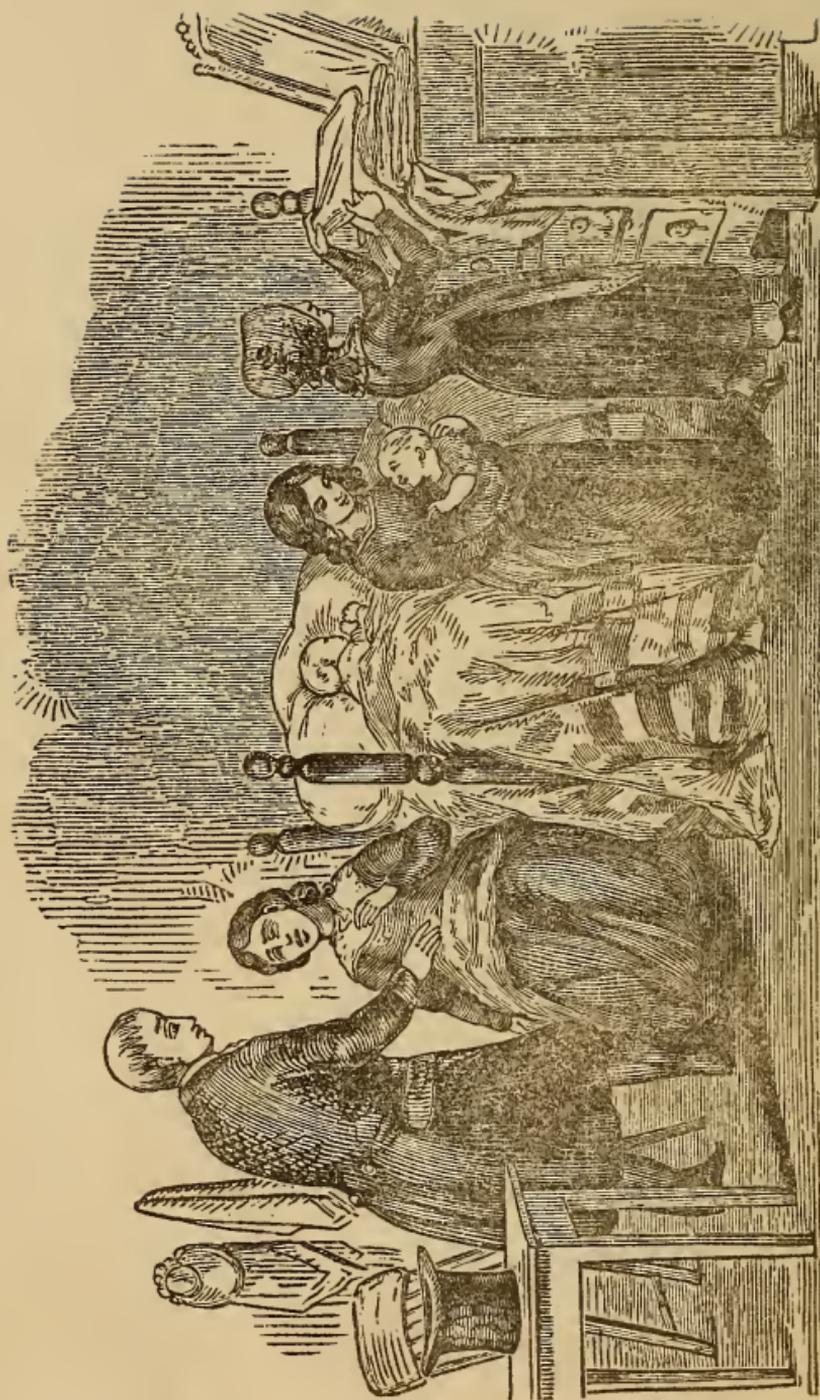


deposited Dec 31st 1849

recorded Vol 24. P. 494

No 218

Read at D. of S. Jan. 16. 1850.

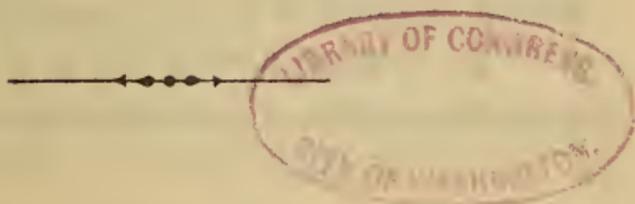


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GOD'S REGARD

FOR THE

WIDOW AND FATHERLESS.



*Written for the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, and
approved by the Committee of Publication.*



BOSTON:

MASSACHUSETTS SABBATH SCHOOL SOCIETY,
Depository, No. 13 Cornhill.

1849.

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P R E F A C E.

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THIS little book is designed as a message of love, to those it addresses. It unfolds, for their encouragement and comfort, a portion of the Divine promises; those springs of refreshing to the weary and afflicted pilgrim. Let me solicit for it an earnest and prayerful perusal. Try, my dear friends, to improve the cheering truths it contains. Try to feel just as our compassionate Father desires the afflicted to feel, in view of his proffered support. For this, you need the heavenly Comforter. The most alleviating truths, without his co-operation, will be of little avail. Then, ere you commence the reading of these pages, plead for the Spirit's applying and consoling influences; and as you rise from their perusal, still breathe the breath of prayer.

Also bear in mind that every Divine encouragement carries with it an obligation. If Jehovah promises, we should confide; if He hold out his supporting

arm, we should lean upon it. Afflictions, however severe, can never release us from this reasonable claim. Confidence in God is an imperative duty ; and shall we sinfully distrust, because our spirits are broken ? No, He is the healer of the wounded spirit, and when the affections are crushed, when we have peculiar need of his aid, He especially requires us to trust him. Here alone, should our distracted thoughts and riven hearts repose.

Then let me tenderly entreat those whose companions have been torn from their embrace, and those little ones who will hear no more, a father's voice, nor see a father's smile, to read the ensuing pages with a confiding, childlike spirit, and with a constant looking to the Father of mercies for the supplies of his promised grace.

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GOD'S REGARD

FOR THE

WIDOW AND FATHERLESS.



CHAPTER I.

God's Blessings Graduated by the Circumstances of his Children.

God's compassion is deep, pure, and overflowing. He is ever alive to the sufferings of his children. He represents himself as afflicted in all their afflictions—as grieved when they are grieved. He delights to soothe the agitated bosom, to bind up the broken heart, to pour oil into the wounded spirit. Yet his favors are distributed with consummate wisdom. The bounty is measured by the necessity. He imparts no

redundant favors, nor withholds the needed supply. He gives strength to bear in the day of weakness; comfort to sustain in the day of trial. "He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." We have innumerable evidences that the compassion of our heavenly Father is thus wise and watchful. His word, his providence, and, if we are Christians, our own experience, alike affirm it. How often it has been our grateful exclamation, "He is indeed a God at hand, and not a God afar off." When have we been in peril, and not received the required succor? When have we fallen into the abyss, and not found there his hand to support, his smiles to cheer? How remarkably expressive of this prudential tenderness and love, is the declaration of the Psalmist, "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows is God in his holy habitation." Their grief may be deep and pungent; yet they are not forsaken. As their sorrows are peculiarly intense, so God's compassion extends to them peculiar relief.

CHAPTER II.

God's regard for the Widow and Fatherless taught either directly or indirectly by the declarations of Scripture.

THE Scriptures are a mirror in which the feelings and purposes of Jehovah respecting man are distinctly reflected. He has there expressed his compassion for the widow and orphan in a variety of respects, and in different ways.

He expressly asserts it. The Psalmist introduces the passage above quoted with the utmost solemnity. In the preceding verses, he has recorded his prayer, imploring Jehovah to arise and scatter terribly his enemies—to drive them away as the smoke is driven away—to melt them as the wax before the fire is melted—and to ride majestically upon the heavens by his name Jah. Then, with this glowing and lofty

conception before the mind, he announces the truth so interesting to all concerned, and so awfully fearful to the wicked, that this Being, great and glorious as he is, is "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows in his holy habitation." They are secure in all their helplessness;—this mighty Being shall ever behold and comfort them; ever notice their wrongs, and vouchsafe their defence. This truth is again asserted in Deut. in an equally solemn and impressive manner, and enforced with all the sternness of a lawgiver. "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. He," this independent and sovereign Lord of all, "doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow." Jeremiah says in the form of promise, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." In Proverbs it is said, "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud, but he

will establish the border of the widow." He will preserve her possessions from the encroachments of injustice, and protect her from wrong. The Psalmist asserts; "Lord, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear; to judge the fatherless and the oppressed." Job says, in justifying himself against the accusations of his friends, "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him;—and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." Again, with the same intention; "If I have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof—if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless;—then let my arm fall from my shoulder blade," thereby indirectly asserting God's determined care of those thus bereaved and exposed. The Psalmist declares, "He preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow." Again—"Thou art the helper of the fatherless"—and Hosea says, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

God has shown disapprobation of their ill-treatment. He gave early intimations of his tender regard for the widow and orphan. In his first visible establishment of civil institutions, he was not unmindful of them. Even the sternness of the lawgiver did not suppress this kind regard; it arose triumphant in all its strength and beauty. In the 24th chapter of Deut. God utters his distinct prohibition—"Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless, nor take the widow's raiment to pledge." In the 27th chapter he has expressed the same in the strongest language of denunciation; "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow." In the 22d chapter of Exodus, he has connected it with the severest threatenings; "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and if they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives

shall be widows, and your children fatherless." The Psalmist mentions it as the peculiar conduct of the wicked, that "They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless." Job asserts the same; "They drive away the ass of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox for a pledge;—They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor." Eliphaz comments on the conduct of his afflicted friend; "Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken." Christ charges the Pharisees with devouring widows' houses—a sin of great enormity. Isaiah, recounting the crimes of the Jews, says; "They judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies." Again; "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees—that widows may be their prey, and that they may

rob the fatherless." The wise man utters the solemn prohibition, "Enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee. Zechariah says, "Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor." In Malachi, God speaks fearfully; "I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and fatherless."

God has shown approbation of their kind treatment. It was not enough for the goodness of God to manifest disapprobation of evils that might be inflicted upon them; he mentions them as objects of special favor. In the 14th chapter of Deut. Israel was directed to lay up a tithe of their increase to be distributed in objects of charity. "And the Levite, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, shall come and eat, and be satisfied, that the Lord thy God may bless thee." On the performance of this duty, the blessing hinged. In the 26th chapter, the requisition is reiterated, and it

was only when complied with, that the chosen seed were permitted to offer the prayer, "Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel." Again, in the 24th chapter it is enjoined, "When thou cuttest down thy harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow, that the Lord thy God may bless thee." Isaiah records a corresponding precept; "Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless and plead for the widow." With the annexation of a promise, it is said in Jeremiah, "If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless and the widow,—then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever." The apostle Paul enjoins; "Honor widows that are widows indeed;" and James says, "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Thus God has surrounded the widow and fatherless with prohibitions and precepts, promises and threatenings. They have, indeed, their dwelling in the bright radiance of their Father's love. No one can read these varied and multiplied expressions of his regard, without the conviction that he feels for them a peculiar tenderness. I have gathered from the sacred page these scattered lights, and concentrated them in one luminous point, that it may be seen by those thus bereaved and desolate, how resplendent is the sun of consolation which shines for them in the word of God. May its beams enter their darkened hearts, and give them joy. How happy the thought, that as our privations of worldly comforts increase, the exhibitions of his love brighten! That the deeper and darker the waves that rage around us, the higher "they toss in angry spite," the brighter the glory that gilds their foaming summits! The goodness of God is indeed suited to our varied wants; it is fitted to

relieve in the most painful condition, even commingling the bitterest sorrow with joy. God can dissipate the rushing tempest. The lot of the widow and orphan, drear and desolate as it is, is not all desolation. No; weeping, widowed mother, look upward, and behold "thy God, thy glory."

CHAPTER III.

God's Regard for the Widow and Fatherless Illustrated by Facts.

IT is delightful to trace the footprints of God's mercy in the developments of his Providence; especially when they attest the faithfulness of his promises.

We will first contemplate such as are affirmed by Scripture.

The widow of one of the sons of the prophets furnishes an instance. The servant of the Lord, her husband, had contracted a debt, which at his death, remained unpaid. His creditor was one of those harsh, iron-hearted men, who *must* have their *just* debts, however much suffering it may cost the honest poor from whom they are wrung. While her heart's wound was still throbbing with the loss of

her husband, he unfeelingly obtruding himself upon her grief, solicited his dues; and, as in her penury she had nothing to pay; proceeded with sordid selfishness, "to take her two sons to be bondmen." Pitiless man! What shall the helpless widow do? God casts his shield about her. She is divinely moved to ask assistance of Elisha. He inquires, "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." He directed her to borrow empty vessels "not a few" of her neighbors; and when she had shut the door upon herself and sons, to pour into the same till they were all filled. She did so. "Then she came and told the man of God; and he said, go sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." Surely God cares for the defenceless.

The widow of Zarephath was likewise provided for by a miracle. True, this was

performed in part to feed Elisha; yet it was evidently designed to preserve also the life of the widow and her son. When the prophet first met her at the gate of the city, she was in the last extremity of famine. For as he said to her, "Bring me, I pray thee a morsel of bread in thy hand," she pathetically replied, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse, and, behold I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." But "Elisha said unto her, Fear not;—the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." "Amid famine and death God has determined to preserve thy life, and make thee the instrument of preserving mine."—Afterwards when the gushings of maternal love were chilled, and the desolation of her widowed heart was made still more desolate by the death of her son, Elisha

prayed, and the "icy clay" was restored alive to her arms. Behold, what God has wrought for the sorrowing.

"But these," the distrustful may say, "are instances of miraculous interposition, and, therefore, inapplicable to us." True, these were miraculous events, but they indicate the feelings of Jehovah toward his afflicted children; and consequently are solid grounds of encouragement and trust. But I will mention two or three instances where relief was administered in a way more consonant with the ordinary course of Providence.

Elimelech and his wife Naomi lived in Bethlehem-Judah, where they had two sons. They apparently enjoyed a pleasant home; but famine pervading the land, they removed to Moab, where subsistence could be more easily obtained. The father soon died. The sons, Mahlon and Chilion married Moabitish women, and settled down in the quiet of domestic life. But as one awaketh from a dream, they too were

shortly summoned from the scenes of time; "and the woman was left of her husband, and her two sons." How dreary was now her condition; a childless mother, a widow and a stranger! Her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, probably resided with her, the sorrowful remnants of her once happy family. Their society was undoubtedly grateful, yet it could have been little but the sympathy of griefs,—the mingling of tears.

Naomi determines to return to the land of Judah—She advises her daughters-in-law to return "each to her mother's house;" for why should they unite their fortunes to the homeless widow? But they wept at the suggestion. After much entreaty however, Orpah, affectionately kissing her mother-in-law, departed. But "Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried."

The two widows, strengthened by mutual regard, and under the protecting care

of Jehovah, took their way—a lonely, weary journey to Bethlehem. When they arrived, the whole city was moved. Naomi's kindred and acquaintance gathered around them with fond recollections and sympathetic greetings. But amid all these testimonials of affection, the bereaved mother and wife was sad. The tender associations of her former domestic enjoyments crowded on her mind, and overwhelming her with sorrow, she exclaimed, "Call me not Naomi" pleasantness—"but Mara"—bitterness—"I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." How painful a depth is here opened into the widow's heart!

Indeed, to human view her condition was sad, scarcely a single ray penetrated the thick darkness around her. But "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts." In the secrets of his counsels *he* had a way to relieve the wanderers.

Their arrival was about the time of barley harvest. The affectionate Ruth

went out to glean the scattered heads of grain in the fields for their mutual sustenance. Providence led her to the fields of Boaz,—“a mighty man of wealth” of Bethlehem. When he learned that she was the Moabitess, he gave her a cheerful welcome both to the food of the laborers and to his fields during the harvest. He also bade the young men treat her kindly, directing them to “let her glean even among the sheaves,” and “let fall some handfuls of purpose for her.” The first day she carried home an ephah—about three pecks—which she shared with her mother-in-law. The widow's God had opened his hand to their necessities; but still richer blessings were in store. Boaz belonged to the kindred of Elimelech, and according to the custom in Israel, he united himself in marriage to Ruth, and gave her a home of honor, wealth, and comfort, in which her mother-in-law was in some sense a sharer. For when Ruth had borne a son, “the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the

Lord which has not left thee this day without a kinsman—and he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age.”

Thus God verified his promises; guiding and nourishing both as the tenderest parent; and elevating Ruth to the pre-eminent distinction of becoming one of the lineal ancestors of our Lord.

Another instance is that of the Shunamite who treated Elisha with so much kindness and hospitality; and whose son, God, by his instrumentality, raised from the dead. For at the time when the interposition of Providence, related in the eighth chapter of 2d Kings, occurred, she was evidently a widow, and experienced a widow's protection.

God had determined to send a famine of seven years upon Israel as a farther chastisement for their continued idolatry. The woman, instructed by the prophet, was induced to take up her residence among the Philistines, beyond the reach of the

divine visitation. At the expiration of the appointed period, when fertility again covered the fields, and joy once more awoke in their habitations, she returned to dwell among her own people. She found her possessions in the custody of others, violently and wrongfully retained. She applied for redress to the king; and though Jehoram was a man of little moral principle, and cared little for the sympathies of humanity, yet, owing to a series of circumstances divinely ordered, he was induced to assert her rights and restore her possessions; thus becoming the unwitting agent of "the Judge of all the earth" in carrying out his gracious determination to protect the border of the widow from spoliation and wrong.

Esther too was an orphan. She was early cared for by her kinsman, Mordecai. Naturally attractive, educated and furnished with great accomplishments, she became an object of general esteem and admiration. She was exalted to the participation of a crown; made the instrument

of preserving the lives of thousands of her countrymen, and turning the wrath of men to the praise of Jehovah.

Christ also evinced to the widow and fatherless the most cordial sympathy. He showed it when he met at the gate of Nain, the bier of the widow's son; and, moved with compassion, commanded back the departed spirit. He showed it in his kind, parental regard for the orphan family of Bethany, in his friendly interviews, gentle reproofs, and as he wept with the bereaved sisters at the grave of their brother, and bade the dead "come forth." Especially, he showed it, in that purest, tenderest affection, which, amid the darkest desolations of Calvary, gushed from his dying heart toward his probably widowed mother. Truly, Jesus pities the lonely.

We will now contemplate facts occurring in the common revolutions of Providence.

P., was a native of Massachusetts. For the benefit of sea-air, being in feeble

health, he removed to Portland, Me., with his wife and two little daughters. An active, enterprising man, capable of turning his hand to almost any thing he chose, he was induced to enter a vessel engaged in trade with the West Indies, as mate. He went several voyages and acquired property. He grew, however, weary of the hardships and perils of the sea. But being urged, he was persuaded to try his fortune once more; and, embarking all his property, set sail for the West Indies, thinking, that if usually prospered, he should accumulate sufficient to raise him above the necessity of going again. Such are human anticipations.

Just before the ship reached its destination, it was becalmed near one of the Spanish Islands, in the harbor of which lay a vessel of somewhat suspicious appearance. Soon a boat put off from it and made toward them. The Captain, being confined by sickness, gave the command to P. The strangers came alongside, and

raising a blunderbuss, and snapping without discharging it, began to climb up the sides of the vessel. P., bewildered by this unexpected demonstration of the blunderbuss, being a man of decision and resolution, and feeling that it was his only alternative to save the ship, cried to his men, "Now is the time," and led the way to drive them off the railing. He was instantly shot through and thrown into the sea. The rest of the crew were captured, confined in the hold, and the ship towed into the harbor. After a short confinement, they were stripped of every thing valuable, and turned loose to make their way home as best they could.

The Captain, knowing the destitute condition of P's family, begged at least a share of his property to carry to his afflicted widow, but was refused. He then asked for his empty pocket-book as a memento; the trifle was wantonly withheld. Unfeeling men! How unlike Him who "is a strength to the needy in distress."

The Captain worked his way to Cape Ann, and then wrote home the dismal tidings. The intelligence came like a falling avalanche on the stricken widow. Overwhelmed and benumbed, her heart was left desolate and drear. The stroke brought on a nervous fever which laid her low for several months. Though among comparative strangers, she received the kindest attention; and was assured of its continuance if she would remain with them; but her relatives in Massachusetts sending for her, she concluded to accept their invitation. Her stranger friends, however, would not suffer her to depart empty-handed. They paid her passage.

Among other benefactors, a Quaker, who had manifested much interest in her welfare, charged her to call on him just before she sailed. She called. He presented her with twenty dollars which he had collected for her relief. As she expressed her gratitude, and, at the same time, bemoaning her unhappy lot, exclaimed, "Oh, I don't

know what I shall do; it seems to me I can never get along;" "O," replied the Quaker, "yea thou wilt; I never knew one *stick* by the way yet; I tell thee, all get through the world somehow or other." A common sense remark quaintly expressed, the recollection of which often encouraged her in subsequent difficulties.

The voyage was long and tedious. They encountered a violent storm. The tossing bark trembled and groaned like "a thing of life" on the angry sea, but the widow's God was there, and bore her through the peril. They succeeded in anchoring off a safe coast; but the rocking of the waves caused her such extreme sea-sickness, that, in her feeble state, she could not well endure it. She was therefore landed, though she knew not how she could meet the additional expense. But Providence directed her to a family by whom she was not only received kindly and entertained gratuitously, but offered a home for herself and fatherless ones so long

as she chose to remain. But when the storm abated, she preferred to resume her voyage; and after receiving repeated Providential deliverances, arrived safely among her friends, where she might truly have set up her Ebenezer, saying, "hitherto hath the Lord helped me."

One of her little daughters was immediately put into a good family, where she was educated and prepared for usefulness. The other remained with her, a solace in bereavement. In their lonely dwelling they were comfortably provided for; the sun shining out "mournfully sweet" after the fury of the tempest had passed.

The Captain of a vessel on one of our Western Lakes was the father of a family of six children. He sailed on a short voyage with the expectation of returning within a week. All his property was invested in the vessel and its lading. A storm arose. It was an anxious hour for that lone family. The roaring winds and the hoarse waves beating against the shore

sounded dismally to the trembling wife and her little ones. But the clouds at length cleared away, and the dashing and foaming surges moaned themselves to rest. She looked anxiously out upon the rippling bosom of the Lake for the well-known sail, but it appeared not. Day after day came and passed, and the wrung heart of the disappointed wife and mother remained unrelieved. The little brothers and sisters often spake of "dear father" and wept; and hand in hand would almost daily wander down to the shore with fond anticipations of meeting him there; but no father came. The neighbors began to whisper that the treasured bark had been swallowed up in the stormy surf. Hope, even in the heart of the fond wife began to fade; yet hope expiring would not die; its fluttering pulse again and again prompted the eager gaze far over the heaving or peaceful main, in search of the wished-for object; and even for weeks after others had ceased to hope, the unexpected tread at her door would send through her feverish

heart a thrill of anticipative delight that the lost one had returned. But every flickering of hope appeared but to go out in still deeper night; neither husband nor vessel were heard of more. The widow and fatherless were left destitute; their natural support and guardian gone forever. But God pitied them. Neighbors were moved to interest themselves in the bereaved family. The four eldest children were immediately supplied with good situations, where they are now being well-trained and educated. The mother and the two youngest were placed in circumstances where she obtains a good support, and enjoys that mournful satisfaction peculiar to the widowed heart, in caring and toiling for those who wear the image of the dear departed.

A father with his wife and two children moved into one of the Western States. He built a log cabin and settled down on the borders of a stream. Soon after, while engaged in his usual employment, he was

drowned. His wife, from her window, saw him fall from his canoe into the water. Agonizing moment! She strove to render him assistance, but her efforts were vain. The vital spark was quenched.

The situation of the widow was indeed lonely; far from her kindred, bereft, in a moment, of the object of her tenderest regard, and comparatively destitute of the means of subsistence. Who could relieve sorrow so intense? None but "the God of all comfort." She needed his paternal smiles and she received them. He touched with humanity the hearts of entire strangers. They showed her the kindest attentions, and cheerfully subscribed one hundred dollars to defray the expense of the return of herself and children to her relatives. Within a month she was on her way to the home of her childhood. Truly, what we need, God bestows.

In one of the delightful villages of New England, there lived some twenty years

ago a family consisting of the parents and six children. The mother was pious and entered into covenant with God. The father, though a man of rare endowments and great respectability, became intemperate and wasted his property. His wife uncomplainingly sunk into a decline, showing but too plainly, that unuttered grief was the death-worm secretly working at the roots of life. It soon became apparent both to herself and those around her, that she must shortly pass from the present scene. The thought of leaving her little ones not only nearly destitute, but in the care of an intemperate father, was extremely painful. To her pastor, standing with her children by her bed-side just before she expired, she said, "Oh! these children; I have wished to live to see them settled in the world;" but added after a pause, "I think I am willing to leave them in the hands of a covenant-keeping God." In a short time she breathed her last. The motherless children of an intemperate

father may indeed be regarded as doubly orphans. But this intemperate father, whether a blessing or a bane to his offspring, in a few months went down to a drunkard's grave, and pillowed his head beside his once suffering wife. But his spirit! ah, where is it?—The children were well provided for. A kind, unseen Hand has seemed to guide them in paths unknown; and in the judgment of friends, they are now all better settled in life, than they probably would have been had their fond mother lived. How true the promise, "Leave thy fatherless children, and I will preserve them alive."

These facts have been gathered with little effort, having fallen almost casually under the notice of the writer. Should one go through the community for the purpose, hundreds and even thousands of equal interest might be collected. Indeed, the same kind Hand that penned "the lively Oracles" controls all our social changes, and sweetens our bitterest sorrows. The

benign spirit of Jesus breathes in the atmosphere around us; his sympathetic hand sustains and shields us wherever we go.

CHAPTER IV.

Its Modes of Manifestation.

God's compassion is ever manifested to the sufferer, when it can be in consistency with himself. His mercy—the source of every blessing to the guilty—is a sealed fountain; the perfections of his character do not constrain its flow; still, when it can flow in harmony with his holy character, it gushes forth. This is its nature and fullness. Within these restrictions its influences distill upon all. As the sun, when hanging in the zenith, spontaneously sends down its genial rays, bathing hill and valley, forest and glade, with his enlivening beams, and nothing prevents but the intervening clouds; so this regard will be experienced by those toward whom it is

cherished, and nothing will prevent, but the clouds which their own disobedience or unbelief shall gather. It is the star of hope and confidence to the fatherless and widow; and if they will but turn upon it their trustful gaze, they will enjoy its selectest influence. They will find it operating as a principle of action with their heavenly Father, ever disposing him to manifestations of kindness and love.

It disposes Him to become their support. Woman, in the honorable sense of Paul, is "the weaker vessel." This is apparent in her physical constitution, her mental structure, her quick and delicate sensibilities, and her allotted condition. She is not robust and bold, and fitted to wrestle alone with opposing difficulties. Her character is soft, gentle, confiding. It is her nature to trust. She seeks something on which to lean: In her element, she is not isolated, but associated; stands not firmly in her own strength, but instinctively clings to that of another. The character of children

is similar. They feel, in some sense, their weakness, and resort for succor to a stronger arm. The husband and father is the prop on which they severally lean. They rise with him as the vine with the oak; they stand because he stands. But the hurricane overturns the monarch of the mountain, and the flexile vine lies prostrate in all its weakness. It is thus with children, and especially with the wife, in the hour of bereavement. Their stay is gone, and they sink with it.

Who shall raise them? Who shall give them strength to stand? *God*; he shall take them up. The almighty Father shall be their friend and succor; he shall put under them his everlasting arm, and uphold them. He will pour into their souls his own vivifying spirit, and renew their strength. He shall whisper in their ears, " 'A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation.' I am now the rest of your sinking spirits. Your *earthly* support was but the feeble-

ness of dying flesh, and crumbling dust. *I* am your *everlasting* support; stay yourselves on me. He, whom *I* uphold, shall never fall." Precious assurance! On this, the widow and fatherless may rest and dry their tears.

It disposes Him to become their Protector. The same imbecility that seeks a support, solicits a shield. The mother and children are no less defenceless, than helpless. A consciousness of insecurity often steals over them, without the presence of the husband and father. He is their natural protector. His is the strong arm, to supply and guard. He provides their habitation, and hovers over it like a guardian spirit, warding off intruding ill. He is the family-shield, every poisoned arrow falls blunted on the father's breast; for when the father smiles, the bitterest scorn has little power to corrode, the wildest terrors to alarm.—That solitary dwelling stands on the hill-side, or in the insulated valley. How dreary, at times, are its apartments, when the father is gone.

It is a dark and wintry night. The tempest is raging without, with all its dismal accompaniments. The boding clouds are veiling the stars in gloom; the sleet is driving through the air, and rattling against the windows; the screaming winds are rushing through every crevice; the snow is fast drifting and cumbering the ways, and the father is not there—a scene, how dismal to that unguarded household! A suppressed trembling seizes the anxious mother, and fear chills the throbbing hearts of the little ones. Their wonted pastimes have almost lost their charm; they are sad and silent, save when the half-complaining inquiry is made, “When will father come?”—How different are the feelings of this same household if the father is present. What if it *is* a dark, wintry night? What if the tempest *is* roaring, and the clouds *are* blackening the heavens? What if the flying sleet *is* filling the atmosphere, and the winds yelling like infuriated spirits of air? What if the snow *is* drifting and blocking

the way? The *father* is there, and the little ones feel safe.

Is this a fancy sketch? If we will recur to the affectionate memories of childhood, we may recollect how sad and gloomy were our own feelings at times, when our dear father was absent, and how our little hearts leaped when he returned.

But *death* enters this dwelling, and takes away this loved protector; and his icy hand almost freezes the life-blood of the wife and children. It is a paralyzing blow. They are left defenceless and desolate. What sinkings of heart; what tremblings of fear fill that rifled abode, especially in scenes like that described above. The children turn to their weaker, though not less endeared protector. The mother, crushed by the weight of her own affliction, has, in a measure, to bear the sorrows of her children. They lean upon her, while she herself needs support. They gather around her for relief, while she herself is oppressed. She endeavors to wear a cheerful counte-

nance, while her heart is bursting; and then, perchance, overpowered with the whelming tide of her own emotions, she mingles her tears with theirs. Sad spectacle! While we contemplate the trembling, weeping band, we drop a tear. Humanity demands it. Yet why should we?

“Back, gushing tears, back to your native springs.”

God, from his holy habitation, looks down upon them with a pitying eye. The Almighty compassionates the widow. He stoops and folds her in his arms. He whispers in her trembling heart, “Thy Maker is thy husband; I am thy Protector—fear not.” A confidence in the invisible Hand raised for her defence is sweetly breathed into her dark and stormy breast, and its darkness is scattered, its agitation calmed. The everlasting Father is the father of these children. He invites them to the repose of his bosom. He lifts their infant thoughts to himself, their almighty Protector; tenderly hushing their moans and

soothing their sorrows. At his bidding angels hover over them, and attend them wherever they go. Even in lone and dismal scenes, he makes their little hearts strong. True, they sojourn in a weary land, but God is to them as the shadow of a great rock—"they rest all day beneath his shade," and are refreshed. Deprived of their earthly protector, their condition may appear defenceless and forlorn, but it is only in appearance. He, who rolls the sun, is their protector; he, who holds the treasury of every blessing, is their Jehovah-Jireh. Ye widows and fatherless, what stronger guardian do you need? When a sense of defencelessness oppresses you, and your hearts grow chill with fear, you can look upwards, and behold the Lord your Rock and Fortress; your God in whom you may trust.

It disposes Him to become the Defender of their rights. This is a depraved world. *Self* is the god naturally worshiped. Men seek their own advantage and emolu-

ment, regardless of the privileges of others. The rights of the defenceless are consequently exposed to infringement, and their dearest interest to invasion. The husband and father is the asserter of the rights, and the defender of the privileges of his family. Under his wing, the wife and children seek security from the birds of prey. It is his office to defend their cause, plead for their interests, and vindicate them from injustice. This conjugal and paternal love is a tower of defence. With what intensity does it glow, when injury is inflicted on, or threatened to, his little community! The tear, glistening in the eyes of one of its injured members, shakes his whole soul with a sense of wrong, and arouses the whole man in defence. The wife and children feel that in him they have an efficient advocate and, if redress is possible, it will be obtained.

This kindest defender *dies*: but man remains the same depraved and selfish being, pursuing his own advantage with

the same eagerness, trampling on the privileges of others with the same indifference. In this universal rush for self, who shall defend the widow and fatherless? This, to the widowed mother, not unfrequently is a question of anxious solicitude. Often as she contemplates her trying circumstances, and multiplied cares—the property newly invested, in a measure, in her own hands, the involved state in which, perhaps, it lies, and the processes of law necessary to secure it to the rightful heirs—her children in their minority, perhaps, infancy, yet uneducated and unprovided for, and with no ability to provide for themselves—the selfishness of the world, the cruelty with which men, influenced by private interest, extort from others their dearest privileges, and consequently, the imminent exposure of the rights of those whom she regards as bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh—she is ready to exclaim, “In whom can I confide?” And when, in addition to this load of care, she reflects on her

own want of wisdom and experience in business transactions, and how much both are demanded in her present circumstances, she is disposed, at times, to sit down in despondency. Darkness settles on her spirits.

But let the desponding widow lift up her eyes in hope; she is not suffering a total eclipse. God is her sun and shield. God is the Judge of the widow and her fatherless children. He will take these defenceless ones under his own protection, earnestly espousing their cause, and vindicating their rights. If they are injured, he will notice it; if they weep, he will regard their tears. He watches over them with all a father's love, and when dangers threaten, he flies to their relief. Yes; He, who is infinite in wisdom and counsel, shall plead for them, and surely, he will not plead in vain. He, who is Almighty, shall defend them, and, if *he* defend, surely, no evil can come near their dwelling.

They "are a garden, walled around."

He will be their champion to resist their foes, their rock, against which the waves of selfishness shall dash and roar without effect. The interested, to deceive their inexperience, may lay deep their schemes, may use a thousand treacherous wiles to rifle their possessions; but God is mightier and wiser than they, and, if consistent with the plans of his government, he will foil their mischievous devices, or turn the intended injury on the heads of the wicked devisers. *They*, in the end, and not these heaven-protected ones, shall be the sufferers. To accomplish this benevolent purpose, however, he may not step out of his ordinary course of providence. He may raise up human defenders. He may touch the hearts of some with commiseration, and invigorate the sense of justice in others; so that they shall become the voluntary advocates of the widow and orphan; assert their interests, and guard their rights, as in instances related above. God may work by second causes, and still be Almighty to uphold and defend.

Let not, then, the widow and fatherless despond, though human selfishness renders their situation dark and perilous. God will ever be true to his promises. He feels for them, and will eventually rectify their wrongs. They may go to him with confidence, when oppressed with cares and sorrows, and lean securely on his arm. They will find him "a present help;" he will stoop to hear their complaints, and readily yield the needed aid.

It disposes Him to sympathize with them. The father is the sympathizing companion of his family. He tenderly reciprocates their joys and sorrows. This is peculiarly true with regard to the mother. All that gives her pain or pleasure, is freely communicated to him. Without reserve, she unbosoms her inmost thoughts and feelings. When any thing presses heavily on her secret soul, how it relieves her bruised and aching heart to reveal the cause to one, who, she so well knows, will reciprocate her grief. It is thus, in a de-

gree, with the children. They expect his sympathy, both when they weep, and when they laugh. When a cloud passes over their early sun, they know their father will feel its shadow with them; and when young joys flutter in their bosoms, they know, that though they are but childish, his sympathetic heart will vibrate in full harmony with theirs. He smiles on their innocent pastimes; and it adds a sweet intensity to all their infant pleasures. The paternal countenance, saddening with their sadness, and kindling instantaneously with the gladness that kindles theirs, is the bright rainbow that cheers their morning sky.

But the bright rainbow is faded. That sympathizing heart is cold. That affectionate countenance, once kindly changing with all their varied feelings, is expressionless. That smile, which flowered on his lips, is withered. *Death* is there. The bereaved mother and children lay him in the grave; they consecrate it with their

tears, and return, a sad, sable group, to their lonely home. How lonely!—What a chilliness creeps around their hearts as they enter! No husband's voice greets, no father's smile welcomes. No one is there to sympathize so tenderly as the husband and father was wont to sympathize, even in all their little troubles and pleasures. That loved home seems almost as drear as the grave in which they have laid its endeared head. They almost feel it would be pleasant to be laid beside him in his own gloomy home. But to none is the draught so bitter, as to the rifled widow. Her heart has been riven asunder. She feels like a torn-off branch. She has been used to a full communication of her griefs. All her cares, all her pains, all her troubles, she has unbosomed; all her burdens, he, who is now no more, has reciprocally sustained with her. For years, perhaps, she has not borne a sorrow without a sharer. But now this bitterest sorrow she must bear *alone*. There is no earthly

friend whose sympathies fully accord with hers.

But though the world is a cold sympathizer, and she finds no heart so warm as to beat and mingle its tide with hers, yet there is an invisible Friend, who will sympathize with her tenderly and sweetly. God, though unseen, will come very near to her. The curtain of his love he will draw close around her dwelling; a brighter light will gleam about it, and a stronger arm defend it. God will soothe her sorrows with his presence. He will take her weeping household into his "heart of hearts," and wipe away their tears. They will find in Jesus just the friend they need; he, who wept at the grave of Lazarus, will weep with them. His affectionate heart is touched with all their pains, and he will kindly listen to all their moans. If they apply to him, he will hold with them the sweetest and most intimate communion; he will be so vitally present to their souls, that he will seem the living

reality of a friend; and they will feel the same confidence and reverential familiarity in communicating to him all that grieves or rejoices them, as they were wont to feel in telling all their varied pleasures and complaints to their earthly parents. How close the tie that binds these rified ones to the blessed Jesus. He will indeed be their solace and comfort. He will graciously scatter, or beautify every cloud that gathers over them.

CHAPTER V.

Its Preciousness.

THE preciousness of this truth has been already implied, perhaps sufficiently unfolded, but I wish to bring it out so distinctly, present it in such varied and vivid lights, that it will not only be seen, but *realized*.

Christian widow, this truth is emphatically yours, that alone, which can stay up your sinking spirit. Take fast hold of it; prove its efficacy; and be assured that though the world may be unfeeling, you have a feeling Friend above.

You may gather your fatherless children around you; while they sob, you may breathe your sighs in prayer. You can tell them the great Jehovah is their father, and his tenderest compassion encircles them. As the kind shepherd gently tends the forsaken and torn lamb, so

He will cherish them. Yes, bereaved family; your sorrows are great, but your comforts are unutterable. You are folded in the sweet embrace of God's sympathetic love; the Shepherd of Israel, who never slumbereth, is yours.

The lot of the widow and fatherless, though drear, is not altogether desolate; it is dark, yet there are minglings of light; there are tears; yet there are placid smiles. Clouds, thick and convolved with tempest, hang over them, yet a sun of ineffable serenity and beauty shines above, and its struggling beams gladden the scene below. The husband and father is no more. They can no more give these endearing appellations to frail humanity, but they may address with the same endearment, him, who is the almighty Father of all. The richest fountain of their earthly affection is dried, but a richer one is opened in heaven. They have lost their natural guardian and protector, yet they have the privilege of claiming the guardianship and protection of the infinite One. He, whose

wisdom has directed, and whose kindness cheered, has left them, yet

“Eternal wisdom is their guide,
Their help, Omnipotence.”

He, who was wont to vindicate their rights, and defend them from wrong, has no more power to guard; yet God, in his holy habitation, is the Judge of the widow and orphan. That tongue, so often heard in accents of sympathy, is silent; yet “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,” still whispers peace to their sorrowing spirits. They have, indeed, been rifled of a treasure. It is a rich blessing to call any one *my* husband, *my* father; but how much richer to call God *my* God. A thought, how precious; for in Jehovah there is measureless fullness. To call *him* mine, is to call every blessing mine; and he has declared himself to be the God of the widow and fatherless in a special sense; *they* may therefore call him “*mine*” with special emphasis. This, “in every dark, distressful hour,” is to them a name of strength and joy.

Again; the lot of the fatherless and widow is one of peculiar *nearness* to God. In one sense the universal Sovereign is equally near to all; in another, he may be said to be nearer some than others. The sun diffuses his rays over the whole earth; yet he shines more brightly on the equator than on the poles. Thus God may communicate himself more clearly to some than to others. He may watch over them with greater tenderness; he may cast around them richer displays of his mercy; give them a more vivid sense of his presence. As we have seen, the fatherless and widow have a special interest in his favor. They are elevated into nearer communion with himself. They enjoy a sweeter view of his smiles. He leads them with a gentler hand; he nourishes them as the tenderest mother the sickly child. They are so near him, that he hears from their crushed bosoms the least whisper and the softest sigh; notices every beating pulse, every throbbing emotion; sees every tear, every shade of sadness, and gently

wipes their tears, and scatters the gathering gloom. How precious to be so near to Him who heareth the ravens when they cry! Ye fatherless and widows, say not despairingly, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me;" your bereavement has but lifted you higher into the love of God—farther into the benignant blaze of the throne.

Again; the lot of the widow and fatherless is one of *peculiar consolations*. All Christians are objects of God's favor; yet, as we have seen, the Christian widow and orphan are peculiarly so. They are his choicest treasure; the objects on which he looks with the kindest regard and tenderest sympathy; which he holds with the closest grasp, and guards with the strongest arm. In the light of his presence they can recline with the most filial confidence, and find peace in trouble, quietness in alarm, hope in despondency. The dews of heavenly love fall gently around them. The ordinary promises of God are to them invested with a glow of richer effulgence.

These are sources of unutterable consolation to the Christian in every circumstance of life; they are his priceless jewels; next in his interest to the crown of life. The exceeding great and precious promises! He would not part with them for ten thousand imperial diadems. But to the believing widow and orphan, they become increasingly precious; and not only so, on their darkened canopy new ones arise, as stars of a sweeter glow and greater magnitude. They shed a healing influence on their wounded hearts; they calm, they soothe, they revive.

No; my mourning friends, God has laid no more upon you than the abundant provisions of his grace will enable you to bear. It is your privilege to taste the sweetest streams that flow from the hill of Zion. Is your home desolate? No; angel bands are hovering over it. Is it "swept and empty?" No; it is "garnished" by Jehovah's presence. The rainbow of his love spans it. His eye, beaming with kindness, is fastened upon it. He follows you

wherever you go; defends you with the greatest care; leads you with more than parental tenderness, into green pastures, and beside still waters. Are you comfortless? Behold the promises—the exceeding great and precious promises! Are they not emphatically yours? Many of them, *entirely* yours? Are they not a mine of priceless wealth? Is there any thing in the wide universe of terrestrial enjoyments, for which you would exchange the privilege of pleading before the mercy-seat the promises of Jehovah to the widow and fatherless? Cast your eye around you. Is there aught so precious? In this moment of passionate grief, would you rashly wish the dear departed recalled?—that new made grave to give up its dead?—that treasured dust restored to your arms? Pause, and think—*Would you?*—“No, no;” methinks you say with a bursting heart, “dearly as I loved him, *no!* God, in his holy providence has taken him from my embrace, and it is well. Let me rest

on his promises, and it is enough."—My mourning friends, shall I weep or rejoice with you? I will do both. I will weep for your loss; I will rejoice for your gain; for gain is yours. Be assured, the cloud that enwraps you, to the eye of faith, is burnished with love; it is covered with cherubic hosts, sent to allure you to your heavenly home.

CHAPTER VI.

Conclusion.

BUT it may seem to some in this class of mourners, that God is vouchsafing no very special tokens of favor to them; on the contrary, that the removal of their beloved head has been but the beginning of sorrows; for that sickness, pain, privation, disappointment, and even violence and wrong, have since rushed in succeeding waves over their once fair heritage.—All this may be true, and even more; and yet the Lord may not have forgotten to be gracious. God may chastise and be a Father still. It may not have been in harmony with his plan of universal good to interpose and prevent these events you deem so calamitous; and when the finished results of the present scenes shall rise up before you in the clearer visions of eternity, they may be

seen to be far more benevolent than if God had even rolled back the wheels of nature for your personal comfort.

Perhaps also you are looking for too much. God's richest blessings are in his ordinary Providence,—in the thousand sensations we receive from the green earth and the pure air; in the gentle tide of health and the more genial flow of social intercourse, in affectionate looks, kind attentions, sympathetic words, and all those unnumbered and almost unnoticed influences, which fan the soul like the airs of Paradise. Moreover, our heavenly Father has never promised us entire exemption from suffering in this life; only the minglings of mercy with judgments, so as to sustain under its burdens.

But do you say, "Not only is the present dark, but the future is dark; all around me is dark?" Let me kindly ask, is not this murmuring? Does it not reveal a heart needing chastisement? And may not this be one reason why God is permitting sor-

row after sorrow to roll over you? Besides, have you not always received enough for present supplies? Has your strength ever failed, even when you have felt most like sinking? And is not present strength all we need? "Give us day by day our daily bread" is the prayer Jesus taught us daily to offer; and if we had needed more, would he not have taught us to ask for more? Indeed, Jehovah has never promised us peace of mind in view of the future, only through the *medium* of *faith*. Our mental laws forbid this quietness of feeling, those soothing sensations, in view of coming events to flow through any other channel. A sweet reliance on God through the blood of the cross can alone calm the agitated thoughts, and give that perfect peace in surveying the dim shadows of the future, which the peculiarly trying circumstances of the bereaved not unfrequently require. Ah! weeping friends; may not *unbelief* be in part the source of your bitter griefs? Let me entreat you—both your undying

interest, and the tenderness, united with the fidelity, of true friendship demand it—murmur not against God, when the fault may be concealed in the dark depths of your own bosoms.

In closing permit me to add, these signal blessings exist only in promise. To be enjoyed they must be sought. The offer is made; it must be received; the promise given; it must be believed. This faith, it is for you to exercise. In this hour of bereavement, it is your duty, as well as privilege, to exercise confidence in God; as your husband and father is taken away, to cast yourselves and all your cares and sorrows unreservedly on the Lord; exclaiming with Isaiah, "I will trust and not be afraid." And is trust in the repeated declarations of him who cannot lie, a hard requisition? Let me entreat you, repose your breaking hearts—your sinking souls—no where else. Is it reasonable to seek other support? Is it reasonable to turn away from the offers of the richest enjoy-

ment, and seek the same blessing from another source—a source that cannot yield it? Be not thus unreasonable. Receive the consolations of unchanging love; dwell in the secret places of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

H Y M N .

Thou God of hope ! to thee we bow,
Thou art our refuge in distress ;
The husband of the widow thou,
The father of the fatherless !

The poor are thy peculiar care,
To them thy promises are sure :
Thy gifts the poor in spirit share ;
Oh may we always THUS be poor !

May we thy law of love fulfill,
To bear each other's burdens here ;
Suffer and do thy righteous will,
And walk in all thy faith and fear.

Thou God of hope ! to thee we bow,
Thou art our refuge in distress ;
The husband of the widow thou,
The father of the fatherless !

H Y M N .

Blest is the man, whose tender care
Relieves the poor in their distress ;
Whose pity wipes the widow's tear,
Whose hand supports the fatherless.

His heart contrives for their relief
More good than his own hand can do ;
He, in the time of general grief,
Shall find the Lord has pity too.

Or, if he languish on his bed,
God will pronounce his sins forgiven ;
Will save from death his sinking head,
Or take his willing soul to heaven.

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THE END.  
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