

A PASTOR'S
VALEDICTORY

19 28. 11.

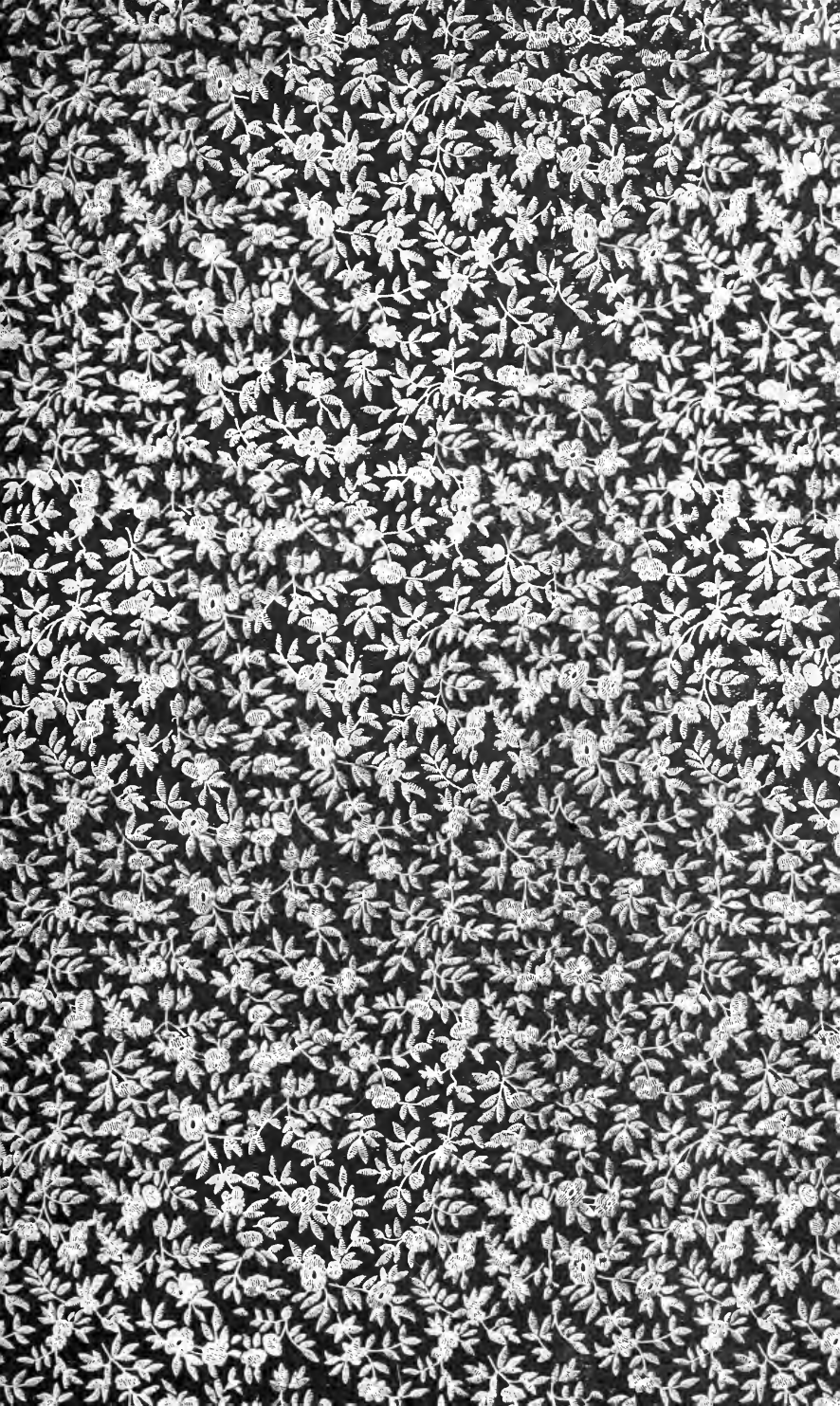
From the Library of
Rev. Allen Henry Brown, D. D.


Bequeathed by him to
the Library of

Princeton Theological Seminary

BX 9178 .S91 P3
Stratton, Joseph B. 1815-
1903.

A pastor's valedictory





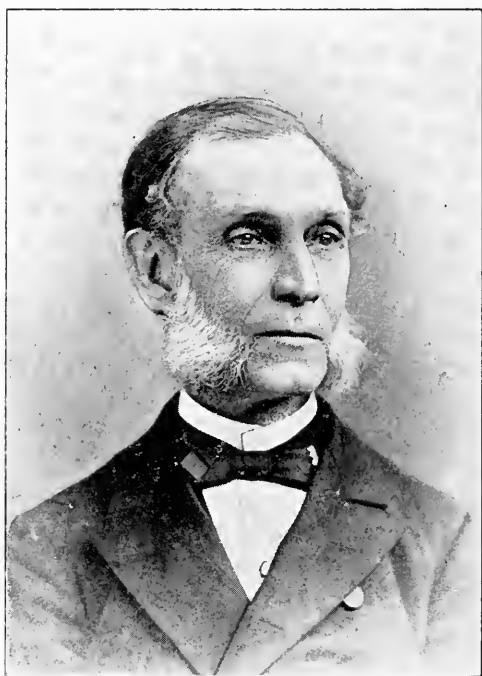
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library



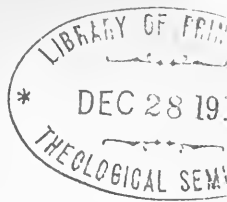
To Rev. Allen H. Brown
from his old friend
J. B. Stratton

Natchez - Miss
April 8 - 1901





Jos. B. Stratton.



* A

PASTOR'S VALEDICTORY

A SELECTION OF

EARLY SERMONS

FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS
OF THE

✓
REV. JOSEPH B. STRATTON, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
FROM A. D. 1843 TO A. D. 1894,
NATCHEZ, MISS.

NATCHEZ, MISS.
NATCHEZ PRINTING & STATIONERY CO.
1899.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE	7
THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST	9
HOLINESS OF GOD	25
THE HEAVENLY CITIZEN	41
JACOB'S LADDER	56
THE SYRO-PHœNICIAN WOMAN	70
THE LILY OF THE FIELD	85
THE SEAT OF SIN	102
THE PENITENT, ILLUSTRATED ..	117
INCOMPREHENSIBLE THINGS	133
THE SHUNAMMITE'S REPLY	148
THE LOVE OF GOD	163
THE SAVED MALEFACTOR	179
THE SHEPHERDS' TENTS	193
THE WALK TO EMMAUS.....	211
MARTHA, THE BUSY HOUSE-KEEPER.....	227
THE DENIAL OF MOSES' PRAYER	242
THE DEADNESS OF THE PLEASURE-SEEKER.....	254
INCREASE OF FAITH	270
FINDING THE MESSIAS	286
ENDURINGNESS OF GOD'S MERCY.....	300
THE PATRIARCH'S RETROSPECT	315



PREFACE.

THE motive which has led, in great part, to the publishing of this volume, has been the repugnance of the author to destroy the material of which it is composed. Manuscript sermons are a most uncomfortable legacy to be left to a minister's family. There is a sort of sacredness about them which deters his descendants from burying them in the waste-basket, or consigning them to the flames. They cannot be set to work again, through another man's lips; for that is literary larceny. The end of all discussion over the disposal of them is that they are decently wrapped up in packages and laid away to shrivel in a garret or moulder in a cellar.

The author, in making his preparation for his final departure from his earthly home, had actually proceeded a considerable length in this work of demolition, and heaps upon heaps of notes, skeletons, scripture studies, and even manuscripts of sermons, fully written out, had been reduced to ashes, when his work was arrested by certain pangs of compunction, and by the reflection that tho' the truth which lay enshrined in those pages had grown dumb, it could still be made to make itself heard, to a limited extent, through a printed message.

There was still, a further thought which enforced the putting of some of these sermons in print. It was that they had been preached in the earlier years of the author's protracted ministry. The grandfathers and grandmothers of the extant generation had listened to them as they fell

from the living voice. A tender fascination coupled itself with the idea of preaching over again, through the press, to the grandchildren of to-day, the identical discourses once delivered to their ancestors.

In the selection of the subjects, the aim of the author has been to secure as large a variety as the size of the volume contemplated would allow, and to present such diversity of style and method as might contribute to the spiritual good of all classes of readers.

I call this book "A Pastor's Valedictory," for it is, in all human probability, the last act I shall perform under my commission as a minister of Christ. The closing days of my eighty-fourth year, with the multiplied infirmities which are sapping stone after stone from the material fabric, remind me that my active warfare is almost accomplished.

May He who gives the early and the latter rain bless with His grace this Autumnal Sowing.

JOS. B. STRATTON.

"Sunset Lodge,"

Natchez, Miss., December 1899.



THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST.

DECEMBER 27, 1857.

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of David forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—LUKE 1:32.33.

THIS cluster of promises, twined about the head of the as yet unborn child of Mary, marked him out as the Messiah—the mysterious “Anointed one,” who had been pledged to Israel from the earliest periods of their history, for the terms used by the Angel are identical with those which had been immemorially employed by the Jews whenever they expressed their idea, or their expectation of a Messiah. The fact and state of Kingship were inseparable from their conception of Christ. Recall that spontaneous outburst of conviction which followed that miraculous feeding of the five thousand men on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The multitude confessed with one voice “this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world;” and as a token of their faith; and with a view to realize consistently and fully, the fact which their faith had embraced, they were about to take Jesus by violence, and make him a King—His Kingship, as they understood it, was the verification of his Messiahship.

And they had unquestionably the authority of their Scriptures for thinking so. Jacob, their forefather, had foretold that the Scepter of Judah should be perpetuated in the

hands of Shiloh, and that unto him should the gathering of the people be. David in Psalm II had recorded the Divine decree, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." Isaiah had written, "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end; upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment, and with justice from hence forth, even forever." Jeremiah had written, "behold, the day shall come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." Zachariah had written, "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion—shout O daughter of Jerusalem—behold thy King cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation;" and Micah had written, of Bethlehem, the City of David, that though "little among the thousands of Israel, yet out of her shall come forth he that was to be ruler in Israel." These are only a part of the many intimations to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures of the fact, that the Messiah was to be a King; and the Jews were certainly right in adopting the principle by which they tested our Savior's claim to the Messiahship—"No King—no Messiah."

The correctness of this principle, our Lord himself admitted, as do his Apostles, in all their teachings concerning him. In claiming to be the Messiah, he claimed to be a King; and such a King as the Scriptures had said the Messiah should be. At the beginning of his ministry we hear Nathanael acknowledging him in such terms as these, "Rabbi thou art the Son of God—thou art King of Israel;" and Jesus evidently commends this profession of his faith, in the form in which it was expressed. And so, near the close of his ministry, when Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Art thou the King of the Jews," he

replies, "thou sayest it"—a distinct and public affirmation of his claim to the office. "My Kingdom;" "my throne;" "my servants," are phrases which occur repeatedly in his conversations and addresses; and when he hung upon the cross, the taunt of his enemies (evidently in derision of that which had been the foremost of his pretensions as they deemed them) was "if he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." And so after his ascension, his apostles in passages altogether too numerous to be quoted, reiterate the same declaration, that Jesus, as the Messiah, was a King. From the day of Pentecost, when Peter declared to the Jews that David in the sixteenth Psalm had foretold his resurrection "knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne," to the end of the inspired record in which John represents him in the vision which he had of him in Patmos as having on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords;" there is no variation in their testimony. As they everywhere preached Jesus as the Messiah, so they everywhere proclaimed him as a King. If the words of the Angel to the Virgin Mary then were true words (and we cannot admit any other thought concerning them), we must find in the Child, who in due time appeared as her offspring, something which can be said to sustain his title to the name and office of a King—something which will correspond with and fulfill that very extraordinary form of kingly rank and power which is portrayed in the Angel's words, "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever—and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

And yet, it must be confessed, that the last thing which one would have suspected concerning the child born to Mary,

or concerning the man, into whom that child grew, as he appeared during his sojourn upon earth, was that he was a King. You may look at him in any of the positions almost in which he appears from his nativity to his crucifixion, and you will say probably, "were such claims associated with such circumstances in any other person, we should be constrained to smile at the childishness, or pity the insanity of his pretensions." Is this a royal infant, you would ask, who is opening his eyes to the light in a manger and is hushed to his first slumber in a stable in Bethlehem? Surely nothing less than an embassy of angels, such as visited the shepherds, or a sign as illustrious as the star that appeared to the wise men of the East, could have convinced one of this. And is that a royal youth, you would ask, who for long years was so identified in condition with the family of a poor mechanic of Nazareth, that the public, so far as they were cognizant of his existence at all, knew him as only "Joseph, the carpenter's son?" Or is this a monarch, a man of royal rank, who during the time that he did draw the attention of the public to him, was noticeable mainly for his singular lack of everything which constitutes kingly state; for his lowliness of mind, his poverty, his privations, his toils, for his sympathy with the humble and the weak, for his want of popularity or political influence, and finally for the violent and ignominious form of his death? Not under such aspects does the royalty of this world appear, nor by such tokens does it ordinarily hope to gain credit for its claims. But still the highest testimony that we can appeal to in any case, that which forbids all suspicion and all dissent, says of this child, this youth, this man, that he was a King. How shall we harmonize the apparently discordant elements in this problem? What theory can arrange these seemingly disorderly materials?

We may begin the attempt to answer these questions by

remarking that Christ as a King is not obliged to appear under those outward forms in which the Kings of the earth embody and exhibit their office. Though he sits upon the throne of David, he does not owe his kingship to that throne. It does not follow that unlikeness in form to the Kings of the earth disproves the fact of his being a King. By no means; for what if we should find the reality of the thing called kingship, in Christ, rather than in these human representatives of it? What if the caricature of the thing, if caricature there be in either case, should be found in them rather than in him?

These questions are not proposed at random. They point to what I suppose to be a great truth enveloped in the mystery of the world's history; and that is, that Christ is the only *real King* that the world has ever seen; and that the institution of the kingship as it is found amongst men, is only a dim and often a monstrous adumbration of the fact of kingship as destined to be developed by Christ. Earthly thrones and governments are similitudes or types; showing first, man's need of something, and secondly, God's purpose to give him something, which shall realize the blessing sought for under the institution of the kingship. David, as a King, we know, was a shadow of him who was to come, that is, Christ; and so, I suppose, are all others who have borne that royal office. David, to be a King, must array himself in the appendages of royalty; for men who judge the substance by the symbol, the fact by the form, cannot discern royalty apart from its appendages. And other Kings make good their claim to royalty by the same expedient. But the King, after all, is something distinct from his regalia. He is the center and the soul, the depository and the dispenser, of the organic life of the State. He is the index and the regulator of its order; and the order of a State is inseparable from the life of a State. It is the

mode and condition under which its life sustains itself, and acts itself forth. A State without order is a State in anarchy—which is no State at all. The Kings of the earth are the visible representatives of that order which the earth is ever seeking after, as its greatest blessing; and the Kings of the earth have been given to it by God, as a sign and pledge that the blessing it wants is something which it is his purpose to grant it. Thus says the apostle, “the powers that be are ordained of God, whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God.” The imposing appendages with which we are accustomed to invest “the powers that be” are only designed to help us to recognize them, and feel, so to speak, their presence and authority. These things are not ordained of God; but the powers themselves are. By whatever name distinguished, or in whatever mould cast, the kingship, the governing soul or center, the index and regulator of the order of the State is ordained of God.

But is this human kingship the final, the perfect form of the institution? Does it meet the need which called for such an institution? Does it represent and realize fully, that ideal which has ever floated before the minds of all who have attempted to solve the problem, or demonstrate the model of government? No, we answer—and it never will. Christ, according to the Scriptures, is the world’s King; and the history of the Kings of the world, so called, has been but another volume of prophecy, echoing the voice of Scripture, and proclaiming to the groaning creation, that *Christ is its King.*

The sovereigns of the earth are but toys, phantasms, mimic monarchs; keeping alive in the world the hope and the expectation of a true kingship, but never gratifying that hope and expectation; and constituting, as they are the ordinance of God, a token from God that the true kingship

shall ultimately appear. They are the image of a great reality, in and by which, all the benefits which they seem to promise and seem to create, shall be, in truth and in fact, conferred upon the world.

Now, if there be any ground for the conception which I have hinted at, we can see that there is no necessity whatever for the true kingship copying after the model of the kingship adopted amongst men. That is not the model, not the true thing, but only a copy more or less accurate. And if Christ be the introducer of the true kingship, it is no impeachment of his claim in any degree, that he does not appear under the form of the world's kingship. Though judging by the appendages of royalty, as it is exhibited amongst men, he would not be pronounced a King, he may be a King nevertheless; and these other examples of the office with all their imposing insignia may be but poor imitations of it; nay, they may be but a caricature of the thing called kingship.

Let us see, now, by what facts, if any there be, this claim of Christ to the true kingship of the world can be sustained. And in this inquiry it is obviously legitimate that the whole history of Christ should be inspected so far as it bears upon his relation to our world. With the Scriptures in our hands, his personal ministry in the flesh is but a part of this history. There are pages, or volumes of it, to be read prior to his advent as the child of Mary; and there are other pages or volumes of it to be read subsequent to his ascension. From all that we know of Christ's agency in and upon our world, we are to look for the evidence which is to determine his right to the title and office of King.

First then, we have the fact presented to us that he appeared in our world, out of a pre-existent state, in virtue of his appointment as Mediator between God and man. The great work of peacemaker, reconciliator of our apostate race

to their Divine Father and Supreme Liege, was what brought him to this earth. And to effect this object, to be a complete Mediator, we are taught that it was necessary that he should unite in one person the nature of God and the nature of man. And so, being the Son of God, in which character he says, "I and the Father are one;" and it is said of him, "he thought it not robbery to be equal with God," he became the son of man, by being born of the Virgin Mary, in which character he could be said "to be touched with a feeling of our infirmities" being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin;" so that in him, all the conditions of humanity, which are sinless, even the most painful and humiliating were fulfilled. He was therefore in the world as the "Word" (which says the Evangelist John) was God "made flesh." He was here as "Immanuel;" that is, "God with us." In his person God is brought into communion, association, fellowship with men, dwells with them, acts with them in the same sphere. For, says the Evangelist again, "the Word, made flesh, *dwelt among us*, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Now, God manifest in the flesh, which is the proper description of the Mediator, describes at once, one, who, in reference to the flesh, the humanity, the species of being, with which he had identified himself, is entitled to take the position and assume the authority of a King. His Divinity is by its nature a title to the office. God manifest in the flesh is the manifestation of one amongst men, who wherever he appears must be acknowledged as a King—the great King, by whom mere human kings rule, who has ordained "the powers that be" that they may be his ministers, and that they, in their feeble measure of power and glory, may image forth his own infinite kingship. In the fact then, that Christ came into the world as Mediator, and that in this character he carried with him, in union with

his human nature, a Divine nature, so that in his person he was truly God as well as man; we see that the kingship of the world necessarily devolved upon him. He as truly subverted or absorbed, or overwhelmed all other forms of it by his mere presence as the sun in the heavens extinguishes the stars. No matter in what form of humanity, or under what set of circumstances he appeared, so long as it could be said of him "in him God is manifest in the flesh" he was a King. And hence the prophet Isaiah employs the gradation which is discernable in his prediction of him before quoted from his ninth chapter, speaking of him, first, as the "child born," and then, as one upon whose shoulder "the government should be laid," and then as one whose name should be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Though he was to appear as the first, yet he was the second, that is, a King, because he was still the third, that is, as being entitled to bear the names by which Deity expresses its essential and incommunicable perfections.

And now resting his claim to the kingship upon this mysterious fact, which his history brings to light, the Scriptures, I proceed to remark, give us further evidence of the propriety of that claim, in the regal attributes or the qualifications for the kingship with which he is represented as endowed. Indications of these he gave, again and again, while he was upon earth. Could some philosophical philanthropist, whose soul was yearning for the appearance, on the behalf of a misruled and groaning world, of his ideal King, have followed Christ through his career, and intelligently marked the shining array of virtues and talents which his life evolved, and noticed how adequately they met every demand and exigency; how steadily they maintained their lustre and their power under all circumstances; how under an endless variety of phases they ever exhibited the same ce-

lestial purity, and the same glorious perfection; he would have said "O could these virtues and these talents but meet in some occupant of a throne! O were Cæsar but a Jesus, my dream would be fulfilled, my ideal king would be no more a vision of the imagination, but a living reality!" When the Psalmist would describe the royal attributes of God, he says; "justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne, mercy and truth shall go before thy face;" and just these things, we may say, that is, integrity which even his bitterest enemies could not convict of a single failure; wisdom, which withstood the assaults of the wildest tempters; truth, which was never marred by the shadow of deception in himself, and which never left deception in others unrebuked; benevolence, which knew no self, and which offered life itself as a sacrifice for the good of others; just these things we should select as those which gave the character of Christ, its peculiar type and its unapproachable excellence.

But this is only the furniture of his kingship exhibited, so to speak, through the medium of his humanity, and on the partial scale, required by the condition of his residence upon earth. These royal gifts have found the destination which the philosophic philanthropist would, as I have conjectured, have desired to give them. They have been exalted to a throne, for "him" says the apostle "hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour." The history of the Mediator does not terminate with the history of his humiliation. He has gone up again to the heavens from which he descended when he was made flesh and dwelt among us; and now ever liveth at the right hand of the majesty on high, clothed with the perfections, which while here graced his humanity; but which there, unrestricted by the conditions in which his humanity here appeared, can be exercised in all the boundless scope, and in all the matchless efficiency,

of the attributes of God. He who sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, has all the kingly prerogatives and endowments at his command which dwell in that right hand. "In him," says the apostle, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." What the kingship of the world demands therefore in the person who claims it, in order that it may be a reality and not a mockery, I say is completely found and fulfilled in Christ.

And now in the third place, I remark that as he has the title to the kingship, and the qualifications for it, so he has a kingdom, a body of subjects over whom he exercises his kingship. "He shall reign," said the angel to Mary, "over the house of Jacob," but the house of Jacob, we know from other passages of Scripture, means what the ancient Israel represented, the Church. Christ has a people in the world who acknowledge him as King. No matter to what earthly sovereign they profess allegiance, no matter where, under the dynasties and governments of the world, they may live, Christ's crown, in their view, is the crown of crowns. No human king is king to them when his kingship comes in conflict with the kingship of Christ. As the man plants the acorns, which in the slow lapse of years, shall appear in the landscape as a forest of giant oaks, so Christ during his mission as Mediator to our world introduced into it the elements which in their operation upon the souls of men have wrought a phenomenon quite as signal as the rearing of the forest, where, before, was a vacant field. He has made a body of men new creatures in himself; he has made that which was flesh, spirit; he has converted the children of the devil into the children of God; he has raised up in the world and out of the world, a generation of whom he can say, "ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." In this kingdom he reigns supreme. He is its Mediator—King, and the royalty which binds it to

him is strong and deep as the life-strings of the heart in which it resides. What we call the visible Church represents this kingdom, but it really consists of all, wheresoever found, who in virtue of his mediation have been redeemed to God and sanctified by his spirit; and in this true church, Christ has recorded in the world's history, in all ages, the fact that he is King.

But the Scriptures teach much more than that Christ reigns in his church. He reigns also for the church. He is King in regard to whatsoever concerns the church. He commands and controls whatsoever can affect the church. Thus he is said to be "head over all things to the church." The world, out of which the church is gathered, and in which it exists, is not independent of his dominion, and is under his regimen, for the sake of the church. It does not tolerate the church, but it is tolerated on account of the church. It was made for Christ's kingdom; it is preserved in order to the completion of his kingdom; and when it is needed no more for his kingdom's sake, it will exist no more. And while it stands, it has no power in an atom of it to move against his consent, or his bidding, and is working together in all its parts for the accomplishment of his mediatorial purposes, and for good to them that love God and are the called according to his purpose. Hence his promise in regard to the church "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

And so he is king in regard to whatsoever is connected with the mission end of the church; "I am with you always," he said to his apostles when he gave them the charge to go and make disciples of all nations; and this word, "I am with you always," dwelling as it does as an ever living promise in the bosom of the church, is a security that his kingship is ever co-operating with the church. He is reigning over the world and in the world, for the furtherance of

the work of the church. Just as he is said to have been in the church of old "in the wilderness," and just as he opened the sea, and made the rock gush with water, and the heavens rain down manna, and the walls of hostile cities fall to the ground, and the hearts of brave armies quail before the terror of his presence; for their deliverance and their triumph, so still, he is in the midst of the Sacramental host of his elect. And though their wanderings may seem long, and their victory and their inheritance seem to tarry strangely in their coming, yet, as surely as Israel reached the promised land, Christ, the King, in the greatness of his strength will travel with his church, till he and she together shall cross the last entrenchment of the enemy, and trample the ruins of the last stronghold of Satan beneath their feet. Such then, is his kingdom, the church; and the world so far as it is regarded as the scene and the subject of the church's operation.

And now, there is one particular more, which I will glance at as confirming and illustrating this kingship of Christ—though it has been to some degree anticipated in what I have just said—and that is, that he appears in the world actually exercising the office and performing the acts of a King. His agency as seen in the world is such, so to speak, as indicates a kingly policy. For instance he is a law-giver. He commands with absolute authority the conscience of his subjects. To disobey him is more than a political crime, it is a moral offence, it is sin, it is wrongdoing before God, which God will judge and punish. You might make a blank of all the statute books promulgated by human legislators, you might abolish your courts of justice, and pull down your prisons, and yet, there are men in the world who would feel themselves as much under law as ever—men who would turn away from certain practices and indulgences with as much dread as if the interdict of Sinai's

thunder were bidding them beware. They are the men of Christ's kingdom; and they would do this because they recognize the obligation and sanctity of his law, as something apart from and above the enactments of human legislators. So truly, so effectively, by this kingly law, this imperial word, he governs his people.

And then further, while governing them, he defends them. They follow him as his sheep, and he as their shepherd protects them against all their enemies. "I give unto them eternal life," he says, "and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hands." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ," he has taught them to say, "shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." And so again, as a king he appears prosecuting a scheme of conquest in the world. He has not only a territory in which he reigns, but a territory which he seeks to win. "The heathen shall be given to him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession" is a promise given to him as Mediator, which he is engaged in bringing to its fulfillment. He is looking forward to the hour when "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father." He proves his kingship thus by his kingly achievements. He conquers by his grace every soul that comes into his kingdom. Every case of conversion is an illustration that he is prosecuting his victories in the world. And the power that subdues one rebellious heart is proved, by the fact, to be equal to the conquest of any other, and of all others. And that power will ultimately lead into willing captivity to his sway every soul that stands written in the roll of his redeemed people, or in the book of life. Christ is thus the true conquerer of the world, the reality,

great and glorious, of which all the vaunted conquerors of the world, the Alexanders and the Napoleons of human history, are the miserable caricatures; conquering not by fire and sword—not by the sack of cities and slaughter of armies, but by his word and spirit—and conquering not in the lust of empire, but for the good of his subjects and for the triumph of righteousness. Christ alone has shown the world that kingly thing, a conqueror, and that kingly act of conquering, not by carnal weapons, but by force of truth and in the spirit of love.

And then once more, he stands before us as a King, because in the grand conception of what is his due, he does all things for his own glory. This pursuit of glory in the case of men, though it is the passion of kings, and called noble, is mean and presumptuous. It is again the caricature of a good and great reality. For man's glory is but the worship of self, rendered to an object unworthy of it in the first instance, and tending only to sink him deeper in unworthiness as it is professed and enjoyed. But the glory of Christ is the highest end that can be contemplated by any intelligence, human, angelic or Divine. The pursuit of it by him is that right thing, that kingly act of Deity, which men in their pursuit of glory, vainly and wickedly try to imitate. Of God, we are taught to say, "thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," "Thou art worthy O Lord," the worshippers in heaven are represented as saying, "to receive glory and honor and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." "I reign for myself," is language which is wrong on the lips of human kings; and it always betrays the despot; but it is language which becomes Christ; for his glory is identical with the supremacy of right, and truth, and love; and the pursuit of it is only another name for the exaltation of all worthy objects, for the triumph of all good and

noble principles, for the infinite experience of holy joy in his own heart at the enthronement of holiness in the hearts of all his creatures.

Upon facts like these, we build our doctrine of the Kingship of Christ. It is an actual verity, a supreme potential factor in every man's life, and in the world's history, not a dream of the poets, nor a figment of the schools. The air, we know, is resounding with acclamations in favor of other lordly powers which claim sovereignty over the earth. The "Spirits" of the successive ages pass before the eyes of men in a royal procession; and their heralds go before and cry, "bow the knee." They flaunt their standards in the commercial exchange—in the political cabinet—in the halls of science—in the arenas where avarice and ambition marshal their forces and strive for lordship; and before them the multitude bend their spirits in trust and worship. But it is only the delusion of the madmen of Elijah's day, crying vainly, "O Baal hear us." These are but mockeries of the world's need. There is no King for it but Jesus.

And let this be my last remark; there is no religion for men, but that which sincerely, intelligently and practically acknowledges the Kingship of Jesus; and the doom of those who persist in rejecting him, has been foretold in his own solemn words (LUKE XIX, 27) "those, mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."



HOLINESS OF GOD.

FEBRUARY 22, 1863.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them. Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.”—LEV. 19:1.2.

RELIGION is a due recognition of God by a rational being. To exist in a true form, it must be the outgrowth of an accurate, complete and profound conception of what God is. It may be defined to be the giving to the fact that there is a God, the full effect to which such a fact is entitled. To give full effect to such a fact, the mind must be rightly informed and rightly affected in regard to it. And if there is any one thing more necessary than all others to be known and felt, in order that the mind should be rightly informed and rightly affected in regard to God, it is, according to the Scriptures, that He is a holy being. This is evident from the special pains which the sacred writers take, to impress this idea upon their readers. The God whom they set before us, is described always and conspicuously as the “Holy One.” And that it is his own purpose to be conceived of, as distinguished by this characteristic above all others, is demonstrated by the fact that he causes every thing which is particularly associated with himself, to be regarded as bearing this quality. The moment he indicates that he has taken a thing into union with himself or identified it in any way with himself, he denominates it holy. Incapable as it may be, in its own nature

of acquiring any moral property, in virtue of its relation to him, as his representative or adjunct, it immediately assumes a quality of holiness, not original or proper to it but derived from its factitious position as a symbol or index of himself. Thus when he institutes the Sabbath, as a day belonging to himself, he calls it his "holy day." When he chose the Abrahamic race, as his peculiar people, he calls them, a "holy nation." When he directed the building of a temple, he calls it his "holy house;" and that part of it which was more particularly signalized as his habitation by a visible token of his presence; and which was veiled from the eye of all but the High-priest, was designated still more emphatically, "the Holy of Holies." The vessels, the utensils, and the garments, used in the temple service, were all pronounced holy, because used in the worship of God. The ground upon which Moses stood, when the Lord appeared to him in Horeb and spake to him out of the burning bush, was declared to be "holy ground." Everything, in short, which belongs to God, which he touches, or appropriates, becomes by that fact, holy. The idea of God and the idea of holiness are thus kept in close and immediate association. Whatever suggests the one, suggests the other. What he put thus conspicuously forward, in every exhibition of himself must be taken as the badge or mark by which he expects to be distinguished in the apprehension of intelligent creatures. God would be pre-eminently recognized as a Holy God. Find him where you will, he demands of you that you couple this idea with your conception of him.

I propose to inquire this morning, as particularly as we may be able, into the meaning of the term the holiness of God; and to indicate the obligations which the possession of such an attribute by the Creator lays upon the creature. First, then, what are we to understand by the proposition of the text, "I am holy?" The usage of Scripture will fur-

nish us with the proper answer to this question; and will disclose a wider range to the sense of the proposition, than in our ordinary way of speaking, we are wont to allow to it. The initial thought involved in the word, as applied to God in the Bible, is that of *separation*. This is evident from the fact that whenever it is applied to created things, it is used as the opposite of common. By analogy therefore, as appellative of the Deity, it must describe him as subsisting in a state of uncommonness, if I may use such an expression. It designates him as a being by himself, occupying a position removed by an absolute and infinite interval, from all other's beings. It indicates the singularity of his nature, the complete and unalterable disparity which separates his essence from that of all creatures. He is God alone, isolated in the inviolable and unattainable perfection of his Divinity. Hence, in the song which Moses sang after the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, he asks, "who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods who is like thee glorious in holiness?" ; and Isaiah in his 40th chapter, presents the challenge "to whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" In both which questions, there is a direct and express allusion to the holiness of God, as coincident with that unlikeness to him which is predicated of other beings. The Scriptures abound with similar passages, classifying and defining God as it were by this unlikeness to any thing else which exists. Men and angels have their fellows—their similitudes—but God has none. As wide a gap as lies between the infinite and the finite, lies between him and the loftiest creature. Comparison, in such a case is out of the question; and any thought of it, or attempt at it, is an affront to God. To deify anything else is to perpetrate falsehood, on the grandest scale, for Deity is an incommunicable thing. It is the august mysterious, awful specialty of God. It describes what be-

longs to him and what by an absolute, eternal necessity cannot belong to a creature. Hence the first statute of the law which was pronounced on Sinai, declares, "thou shalt have no other gods before me," establishing it as the fundamental truth of religion, that God is the sole being of his kind, and that to give his name, or ascribe his attributes, to another, is rebellion against him. He removes himself by an immeasurable chasm from the whole universe, and allows nothing within its wide compass to claim affinity or equality with himself. He requires all other intelligences to recognize this essential and total diversity by which he is separated from them. He would have them remember, always, that he is the invisible, the inaccessible, the incomprehensible God. As He said to Moses in the wilderness "set bounds unto the people round about, saying take heed to yourselves that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it," so He says to the whole race of creatures. Between his habitation, between his person, and them, there is a bound set, which they can never pass over. To overleap it, even in thought, is an act of profane presumption. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," is one of the distinct offences charged against the wicked in the 50th Psalm, which God declares that he will punish. And here, in the apprehension of this absolute and entire difference which divides the Deity from the creature, is the first element which the Scriptures, propose to our consideration in forming our idea of the holiness of God.

A second element is obtained by regarding this difference under the particular aspect of *exaltation*. God is holy, not merely because he is infinitely separated from other beings, but because he is infinitely elevated above them. The distance at which he places himself from them, is a distance in respect to height. He is not only totally unlike them, but immeasurably superior to them. That this idea of ex-

altation is included in the idea of the Divine Holiness, is evident from the passage in Isaiah LVII., 15 v., "thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." He whose name is Holy, is here called the "high and lofty one," and the holy place in which he dwells is also designated, "the high place." This juxta-position of terms unquestionably indicates a correspondence in the sense of them. God is presented to us, in the same view, when we are told in one proposition that his name is holy, and in another that he is the high and lofty One ; and the place of his residence is presented to us in the same view, when it is described by one epithet as high and by another as holy. We may conclude, therefore, that whenever God sets himself before us, in the character of a holy being, he requires us to take into our conception of him the idea that he is a being infinitely exalted above all creatures. He is in heaven, seated upon his holy hill, enthroned in the unapproachable grandeur of his Divine pre-eminence. Other beings in beholding him, must look not only *away* to a distant sphere but *up* to a higher one. Other beings dwindle into insignificance in the attributes of their nature, in the circumstances of their state and in the measure of their powers, when compared with him. The degree of his diverseness from them is the degree of his greatness over them.

And then to this thought of the boundless exaltation of God, the Scriptures lead us to attach another, which seems to define his holiness still more ; and that is, that of *majesty*, or kingly supremacy. He is not only elevated in nature, but in rank, in office. He is not only seated above the heavens, but he doeth his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." "I am God" he says "and there is none else ; I am God, and there is none

like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done; saying, my counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure." That is, as God, it is his absolute prerogative to exercise superintendence over all things, and to manage and direct all things by his sole authority. The glorious solitude, in which he dwells, is the seclusion of unshared and universal sovereignty. In that vision of him which Isaiah describes in his 6th chapter, where the Seraphim appears crying one to another, "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." "I saw him," he says "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." The cry of the Seraphim, holy, holy, holy, was the acknowledgment of the character in which the Deity was manifesting himself at that moment, when he sat upon his throne, high and lifted up resplendent in the symbols of imperial state. The fact, that drew forth their loyal acclamations, was the fact that made him holy. He was not only a great being, elevated above all creatures in eminence of nature, but a great king transcendent in majesty, as well as in personal dignity and excellence. And it was his majesty, not less than his exaltation above, and his separateness from all other beings, which was referred to in this triple ascription to him of the attributes of holiness. His name was holy, because as the Psalmist says in one place it was "reverend" that is entitled to veneration and homage, as the representative of the Supreme power of the universe; just as in another place it is said to be holy, because it is "great and terrible," that is, invested with that immense and boundless authority which was adapted to fill the rational mind with pious awe and fear.

If now, we combine these three ideas, which we have thus evolved from the sense of the term, holiness, as applied to God, that is to say, if we conceive of him as subsisting in a state of infinite separateness or diverseness from

other beings, of infinite exaltation above them, and of infinite dominion over them. we shall find that we have progressed so far into the import of our theme, as to be confronted with an object whose mysteriousness and awfulness are well nigh overwhelming. How tremendously such a God spreads and towers beyond those forms and proportions under which we ordinarily think of him! Vast and stupendous as are those magnitudes which are exhibited to us in the works of God, how dwarfed they all seem when compared with those which are comprehended in this one attribute, the holiness of God, even as we have now explained it!

But far as we have gone, we have not yet explored our high doctrine to its summit. The last and crowning elevation remains to be noticed. That, in which the holiness of God culminates, we may say, is the essential and perfect *moral purity* of his nature. His holiness is his inherent, original, total, and perpetual antagonism to sin. In this fact, the other facts of which we have spoken, complete themselves. Without this, the other conceptions of God to which we have alluded, would not fully realize the proper idea of God. Without this, his separateness from creatures, his exaltation above and his dominion over them, would all fail in establishing his claim to the name and the honors of God. Even amongst men, goodness and greatness are felt to be cognate and coincident attributes. It is only by the application of a false standard that a bad man can ever gain the credit and fame of being a great one. In a pure and just society he never could be recognized as a great one. The ambition which is now seen in so many sinister forms, domineering in the human heart, is only a corrupt and prostituted affection, which, in its right shape, would appear in the earnest aspiration and endeavor of the soul after eminence in goodness. The diverseness from his fellows, the elevation above them, the mastership

over them, which are to make a man really great, must be a diverseness, an elevation, and a mastership, founded on superiority in moral purity. And God when he requires us to acknowledge those other facts concerning him, which, as we have seen, are included in the sense of the proposition, "I am holy," lays an ample ground for what he requires, in the fact that he is infinite in goodness. The Scriptures proclaim this of him with a scrupulousness and copiousness of statement which must have struck every intelligent reader. So prominent a feature is this in the inspired portraiture of God, that it is the first and ordinarily the only idea of his holiness which the mind carries away with it from the sacred page; those other elements in the attribute at which we have been glancing, being, in a degree, overshadowed by the preponderating dimensions of this. Thus righteousness, uprightness and truth are constantly used as equivalents to the holiness of God. "He is of purer eyes," it is said, "than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity." He is righteous in all ways, and holy in all his works. He has no pleasure in wickedness, and evil shall not dwell with him. All that do unrighteously are an abomination unto the Lord. He is angry with the wicked every day. His law is holy, just and good. Sin is everywhere the object of his reprobation, his enmity, and his aversion. As it is infinitely separated from his nature, so he judicially separates it infinitely from his person and presence. He drives it away—casts it out—he hides his face from it. By fearful tokens he has pursued it, all through the world's history, with his wrath. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together" until now in consequence of the curse which followed the first perpetration of it. Death, including all manner of evil, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, has been its wages from the beginning. By no means, on no account, in no instance, will God clear the guilty. The

angels which kept not their first estate were driven by one fell stroke of vindictive power into the bottomless pit. Apostate men can be saved from the same dark doom, only by the intervention of a Redeemer, who in the person of Deity, bears the punishment due to their sin; and so satisfies the demands of law, and exhausts the penal wrath to which they were liable. The mercy that has opened the gates of heaven, as well as the severity which has built the dungeons of hell, is an everlasting witness to the holiness of God. Providence, could we read its processes aright, is one uniform demonstration of the operation of this principle; and when its processes are all completed, and we shall be able to read it aright, in its grand results, the mighty scheme will stand, like a monument covering heaven, earth and hell with its broad base, and illuminating eternity with its radiant manifestation of the holiness of God.

With that conception of God, which this view of him as a holy being, is adapted to give us, in our minds, we are now prepared to understand the force and extent of that obligation which, the text teaches, the fact that he is such a being, lays upon his rational creatures. "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." That is, man is required to be holy, because God is holy. That man, as originally created, was holy, we know. He was made in the image and likeness of God. It is not too much to say, he could not have been created anything else. In giving a moral nature to a creature it is inconsistent and improbable to suppose that God would have made him anything but a holy being. For man to unmake himself, to reverse his character, to bring his nature under the dominion of sin, instead of holiness—therefore, must be the most flagrant of all breaches of duty towards his Maker. While the proposition, "I the Lord your God am holy," remains true, therefore, the obligation, "ye shall be holy," must continue in

operation. It grows out of the very institution of things. It grows equally out of the condition and laws of man's nature. Holiness is the highest stage of development to which he can attain. His highest distinction is that he is capable of being holy. It is this which identifies him as the offspring of God, bearing to him in addition to the common relation of a creature, the nearer and more specific one of a spiritual child. And such a capability cannot be unimproved or thwarted without doing a grievous wrong to himself.

And still farther, his position as the subject of that actual government which God maintains over the world, obliges him, by all the risk of incurring the penalties of violated law, to be holy. It is by this means only that he can escape the terrible result of bringing down upon him all the weight of the enmity and the hostile power of the government of God. Hatred of sin in God, is only another expression for a disposition and determination to punish it. It is more than a sentiment; it is a statute and a decree, ordaining that all unholiness in creatures shall be treated as a crime. On a variety of grounds, therefore, the consequence, that man is bound to be holy, follows from the fact that the Lord his God, is holy.

What then, we are led to ask, as a question of vast practical moment, is the extent and import of this obligation? What idea are we to form of that holiness which man, in his sphere as a creature as true to God, is required to possess and exhibit? Without entering into any analysis of the subject, we shall find probably, a specific answer to this question, in a remark of St. Paul, in which he states in an actual case, the method by which this holiness had been realized. Writing to the Roman Christians, he says in the 6th chapter and 22nd verse of his Epistle "now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye

have your fruit unto holiness." Holiness is here represented as the fruit or result of that change by which man is delivered from the dominion of sin, and brought into subjection to the will of God. The two expressions, "free from sin," and "servants to God," describe only parts of the same process, and indicate together the condition of the man, who is devoted solely and wholly to the work of fulfilling or realizing the purposes of his Maker in bringing him into being. We have the same idea presented to us, in those passages, which speak of the angels and prophets and apostles, which are God's special ministers, as holy; in those which speak of Christians as being holy, because unblameable in the sight of God; and more strikingly, if possible, still, in that one in which Jesus, whose distinction it was to be holy, declares of those who do the will of God, that they are his brother and sister and mother, that is, affiliated or identified with him by a common nature, and hence partaking with him in this specific attribute of holiness. And how it is, that this devotion on the part of the creature, to the serving of God, authorizes the transfer of the title, holy, which belongs to God, to the creature, a little reflection will easily make apparent.

The holiness of God, as we have seen, is properly something as special, as is the nature of God himself. No other being can possess it, any more than he can be God. But this holiness of God expresses itself in every declaration which he makes of his own will; and wherever that will is executed, his holiness is realized—is carried out into action. And in this view of it, his holiness can be exemplified, by every being who is truly doing his will. To give effect to that will, is to reproduce or re-enact, so to speak, the holiness of God; for as I have said, his will, in any case, is the expression of his holiness. It designates in the creature to whom it is directed a certain condition

in which his own holiness shall be embodied. Just so far as that condition is attained by that creature, just so far does he become an expositer of the holiness of God. He becomes like the vessel into which the water from a fountain has conveyed itself; or like the globe which the sun-beam has pervaded with its light. The fruit or result of holiness, therefore, as the apostle teaches, is re-enacted whenever the man has been freed from sin, and become a servant to God. And now this view of the method of its production will help us still further to discover something of the nature of holiness in man.

As it is a serving of God it must be founded, of course, upon an intelligent apprehension of the will of God, coupled with a conviction of its supreme authority. Irrational creatures, may in a certain sense, be said to be serving God, when without knowledge or design, they perform their offices in the economy of nature; but in no sense can rational creatures claim to be serving him, when the mind and spirit are not parties to the work. The will of God may be done formally—without there being any quality of holiness in the fact. That quality can be ascribed to an act only when the act can be said to be a reflection of the holiness of God, or a response on the part of the creature to that holiness, as expressed in his will. In other words, it can only be, when an act is performed, under a sense of those motives and sanctions which spring from God, regarded in that holiness, which, as we have seen, invests him with his special pre-eminence as God—that it can properly be pronounced holy. Then again, this holiness must contain in it the element of a free and cordial approbation of the will of God in the heart of man. The expressions, “free from sin,” and “servants to God,” certainly imply this. How can the man be free from sin, whose heart is rebelling against the will of God? Or how can

God be served by the man who does his will only through fear and coercion? Love to God must lie at the root of all true serving of him. The affectionate accordance of the mind of the creature with the mind of the Creator is the very life and essence of holiness in the creature. And then, once more, this holiness includes in it the idea of a constant and a total application of the powers of man's nature to the doing of the will of God. Freedom from sin, describes a state—serving God is a business. And if these things constitute holiness in a creature, then holiness must be the state and business of that creature. Hence says the Apostle Peter, "as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all manner of conversation;" and Paul prays for the Thessalonian Christians that the very God of peace may sanctify them wholly, and that their whole spirit and soul and body," that is, their entire nature "may be presented blameless unto the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ." A holy being, is a being, consecrated, or devoted to the service of God. He is a priest, charged in his particular sphere with the office of ministering before the Lord, just as Aaron was in the sanctuary. Thus the body of believers, which is composed theoretically, of holy persons, is called "a holy priesthood." Adam in his original innocence, was a priest, and the beautiful earth, over which he had been set as head, was the temple in which he was ordained to serve. And so, every one who has been newly created in Christ Jesus, so as to be made free from sin, and to become a servant to God, has been reinstated in the position from which Adam was displaced. He "has his fruit unto holiness" in this fact, that his life henceforth, by a full, free and hearty dedication belongs to God, and is to be sacredly appropriated to the execution of his will; as the apostle evidently assumes, when he writes to his brethren at Rome, "I beseech you therefore, that you present your

bodies;" that is, yourselves, "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service, and be ye not conformed to this world, but ye be transformed, by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

And now, we have perhaps, sufficiently developed the main heads of our theme. We have seen in an outline, in what the holiness of God consists. We have seen it appearing in its general form, in the essential and incommunicable oneness of his nature, by which, he is infinitely separate and diverse from all other beings. We have seen this property taking more definite shape, in the idea of an infinite exaltation above all other beings. We have seen this again gathering to itself the august symbolism of an infinite supremacy over all other beings; and lastly we have seen all these distinctions uniting and culminating in his original and immaculate moral purity. From this glorious perfection of the Deity, we have deduced the grounds of an obligation to be holy, resting upon man, in his measure and sphere, as the creature of God; and we have in the last place, indicated the method by which man is to meet this obligation, by consecrating his being to the doing of the will of God, which will, is the expression of the holiness of God, in the form in which it is capable of being realized and wrought out by such a creature.

We have only time to refer to a conclusion or two, to which, these reflections are adapted to lead us. Is God a God of holiness? Then whenever and wherever we acknowledge him, we are bound to acknowledge his holiness. We cannot separate the two. Is he an omniscient God? Then, the eye with which he looks upon us in his omniscience is a holy eye. Is he an omnipotent God? Then, the hand by which he holds us, and controls us, is a holy hand. Is he an omnipresent God? Then the presence with

which he surrounds us, is a holy presence. It is in contact with his holiness that we live and move and have our being. His holiness fills heaven, earth and hell. We can never escape from its gaze, its touch, its power. It sets its seal upon all God's acts and decrees. It attests the passport of the saint to glory; it signs the death warrant of the lost. It is that with which you and I are transacting every moment, and that with which we shall have to transact through all eternity. And is this the God of your creed, my friend? Have you risen to the heights, have you compassed the immensities of this holiness in your conception of God? Is this the being whom you recognize as your companion every day, every hour, every moment as the invisible inspector of your thoughts, your motives, your actions; and the inevitable judge who is to sit at your last trial and to award you your eternal doom? Oh then, why are so many of you content, as you seem to be, with such a dubious claim to the favor of God, as you possess as Christians? And why are so many of you content to live on in such obstinate neglect of God, or such bold defiance of him, as you are doing, as sinners? Surely our theology needs to go back again to its rudiments, and teach us again what be the first principles of a Christian faith! And let it be ever borne in mind, that the only proof of a right belief in God is holiness in ourselves. We must make good our assent to the doctrine, "there is a God," by demonstrating our assent to the doctrine, "God is Holy." And we assent to that doctrine, when we make it operative; when we show the holiness of God actually reflected in ourselves, by making our lives an exemplification of that holiness, by devoting them to the doing of his will. Upon such terms alone, most obviously, can it be expected, that God and man, can ever meet in peace. Upon such terms alone, most obviously, can it be expected that God

and man can ever dwell together in the same heaven. But do the terms transcend your ability? Do you say, they leave you no alternative, but despair? Then learn that God is prepared to give what he requires, for says the apostle, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure." And this he does through the offices of his holy Spirit. The holiness which you cannot attain by your own power, is still attainable, for the means have been provided in the great scheme of redeeming grace. The mission of the Spirit is included in the mission of the Son; and the soul which goes in penitence and faith to Jesus for justification, will receive by a Divine ingrafting that principle of holiness, which by a Divine culture, shall develop itself through progressive stages, till at last, in the immediate presence of God, it shall mature into the perfection and glory of his own image.



THE HEAVENLY CITIZEN.

JUNE 10, 1866.

“For our Conversation is in Heaven.”—PHILIPPIANS, 3:20.

THE type of piety which the Bible recognizes is something which requires, for the adequate description of it, a set of terms which are altogether out of place, when applied to the mere moralist of the world, or the mere formalist of the church. It is a type which indicates so palpable and so wide a distinction between the real Christian and these characters, that it is wonderful that men, with the Scriptures in their hands, so often confound them; wonderful that so many persons, who have been instructed in the doctrines of the Gospel, can fall into the mistake of putting their virtuous disposition and habits, or their assumption of the badges and usages of church membership, for the piety which God requires of his children.

Let us open our eyes, this morning, to this great fundamental fact affirmed by the text, and confess that the proper mark of the Christian is that he is one of whom it can be said, he “has his conversation in heaven.” Though the application of such a text may stagger our confidence in our own right to that name, though it may wither our pretensions to the character of a child of God, as the Saviour’s curse withered the leaves of the barren fig tree, let us honestly make it, for, assuredly, it is just here, in the fact which this text calls for, that the essence of religion, according to the Gospel, lies; and all the phenomena of

religion which a man may conceivably exhibit, must prove but illusory semblances, if they do not go the length of proving that this fact has been verified in his case. What then are we to understand by this declaration of the Apostle, "for our conversation is in heaven?"

Look back a few verses in the chapter and you will see that his precise object in making it was to enforce an exhortation just addressed to the Christians of Philippi, to differ in their walk, a manner of life, from another class of persons whom he characterizes in a summary way, as those who "mind earthly things." From such persons, he argues, Christians must necessarily differ, for their conversation is in heaven; and consequently, their walk must be expected to show that they "mind heavenly things." This antithesis, which he points out between the men who mind earthly things and the men whose conversation is in heaven, leads us at once to conclude, that for all practical purposes, the sense of the expression, "our conversation is in heaven," may be taken to be, simply, that we mind heavenly things. This is the distinctive law or habit of the Christian life, that the subject, minds heavenly things. He can, therefore, have no fellowship with those of whose life the law, or distinctive habit is, that they mind earthly things.

But the expression in the text does more than affirm the fact that the Christian is required, under the peculiar law or habit of his life, to mind heavenly things. It indicates the ground or reason of that fact. It discloses the philosophical principle out of which that fact grows. It enforces the exhortation to differ from those who mind earthly things, not merely by stating that the minding of heavenly things is the appropriate rule of the Christian life, but by revealing an order or state of things lying back of that rule, from which that rule is naturally de-

duced. This is apparent to the scholar who will look at the language of the Apostle as it appears in the original Greek. The word translated "conversation" in our English version, will there be found to be a different word from that ordinarily employed to signify, conversation, or mode of life, or deportment. It is fair to conclude that had the Apostle designed to do no more than state the fact that the Christian, normally, is one who is employed about heavenly things, he would have used the ordinary word signifying conversation. Nor if this were all that he had designed to do, would he have been likely to make use of the qualifying phrase, "in heaven," as he does. He would have expressed in terms which should refer to things not to place. He would have said, "our conversation is" (not "in heaven,") but "about the things of heaven;" just as he had said of those persons, between whom and the Christian he is drawing an antithesis, they "mind earthly things." The conversation of a man, is his daily, habitual manner of living; what he does, here and now; and it is altogether incongruous, therefore, to say of a man on earth, his conversation is "in heaven," when by heaven, you mean a place, as St. Paul clearly does, in the text.

All this difficulty about the meaning of the expression disappears when we give to the word, conversation, the exact sense which it has in the original. It means precisely the standing and the action of a citizen in his relation to the State. It belongs technically to the vocabulary of politics. It contemplates, always, the party to whom it refers, under the specific character of a member of a commonwealth, or government. What it affirms of him, it affirms of him, under this aspect. And when it is applied to the Christian, therefore, it assumes of him that he has, in the act of adopting Christianity, passed into the position of a member of a commonwealth or government. He has under-

gone a process analagous to what we call naturalization; the process by which an alien becomes invested with the rights and privileges of a citizen, in a country in which he was not born. You say of the subject of any of the monarchs of the old world, when he comes to these shores, and goes through the formalities connected with the process of naturalization, he is now a citizen of the American Republic; and upon this fact you ground an obligation to pursue a certain course of conduct, corresponding with this new political relationship. And so, the text teaches us, you may say, of the Christian, "he has become a citizen of heaven" and as such, lies under an obligation to pursue a course of conduct, or exhibit a "conversation" corresponding with this fact. And citizenship, you will observe, attaches to a man though he be not actually present or resident in the country to which citizenship invites him. Tens of thousands of persons may be found to-day dwelling and transacting business in this land who are citizens of lands beyond the sea. Here, notwithstanding their personal association with the communities in which they are sojourning, they are foreigners. The Christian, during his actual abode on earth, is occupying a position analagous to that of these persons. He is a citizen of heaven; a citizen of that kingdom of which heaven (and heaven viewed as that place "from whence" as the text expresses it "we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ") is the proper territory and seat of government. Resident as he is in the world, and engaged in various forms and degrees with its business, he is, nevertheless, a foreigner in it. The closest alliances he may have formed with his neighbors do not alter this fact. Cemented to them by all the ties of domestic love and social life, he still remembers, and on all suitable occasions, requires them to remember, that his citizenship is in heaven. He cannot

locate his country, as the literal foreigner can, beyond the seas. It is not discernable on any geographical chart which his eye can explore. But somewhere in the vast universe it does exist; somewhere as a blessed and glorious region it lies, realizing, literally, all that we dream of when we try to body forth our idea of the kingdom of God. He is a citizen of that heaven from which the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ is to come; and that heaven, we know, is a place, as truly as was the earth from which he ascended. If we never conceive of it as a place, we shall make of no effect many precious and important things which are said of it in Scripture; and if it be a place, it furnishes the scene and the platform for a real kingdom of heaven. If we never conceive of it thus, if we always interpret it (as we must unquestionably very often do), as the power of the Gospel in the soul of a believer, or in any part of the world; or as the visible church we shall make of no effect another large body of Scripture declarations. If we do not give to our ideas of this kingdom, sometimes, a substantial form, how can we understand such a passage as that of our Lord's, "many shall come from the East and the West and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven"? In claiming for this kingdom, a place and a reality as an actual sphere where God is present in his royal person and where he exercises his government by a direct administration, I am not teaching that this kingdom is fixed or limited in its dimensions. I am not teaching, that because it must now be said of it, it is diverse and remote from this world, so that a citizen of heaven, at present resident in this world, has to be considered a foreigner, it is not capable of extending its bound, so as to include and incorporate with itself, ultimately, this world and perhaps, all other parts of the universe, except that region of utter darkness, where

Satan and his followers are to have their part forever. As literally as God's kingdom exists now in the place where the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ is living, we have reason to believe, it will exist here on this earth which is now so generally as a foreign land in reference to this kingdom; and for this we are taught to pray by our Lord, when we say, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as in heaven!" Revolutions and purgations, moral, economical and physical, may make, and probably will make of this world, a part of heaven, where angelic tribes and glorified men shall make up the population, and the sceptre of God's immediate government shall extend over them. Then, the dweller upon earth will have to be ranked no longer as a foreigner in respect to the kingdom of heaven. He will have no longer, like a traveler in a strange country, to sigh after a fatherland far beyond the blue horizon, but as he treads the soil beneath him and gazes upon the scene around him, will be able to say, "here—here—my citizenship is in heaven!" But this is not possible now. Heaven must be thought of as separated from this world by a wide interval, and the Christian when he claims citizenship in it is personating the alien who is domiciled temporarily in one land while the obligations of allegiance and the ties of political kinship identify him with another.

Now, let us take the Apostle's word, "conversation." in the text in this sense as signifying not so much a mode of conduct, as a certain condition of citizenship subsisting between the Christian and kingdom of God in heaven, out of which condition a very definite mode of conduct may be expected to issue, and see in what particulars it may be verified in the experience and practice of the Christian. You cannot, evidently, make this declaration of yourself, "my conversation is in heaven," without first affirming of yourself that you have consecrated yourself supremely, both

in the way of character, and in the way of service, to God. You must have renounced every form of disaffection and rebelliousness toward God. The attachment to and service of other lords in which you have been implicated, originally, you must have repudiated, and in good faith, and from a free and cordial choice, accepted the terms of reconciliation proposed to you in the Gospel; and engaged in a personal covenant with God to render to Him all loyal love and duty. How aptly this change is described by the Apostle, when reminding the Ephesian Christians how they came to have their conversation in heaven! "At that time," he says (that is, in your original, natural state), "ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Wherefore, ye are now, no more, strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." As nations are truly said to be but families amplified, the nation of God's people are called here his household. Part of it are actually dwelling upon the paternal domain, have actual habitation and possession within the territory of heaven. But a part are sojourners and pilgrims in a strange country. They are none the less citizens of heaven, none the less members of the household of God. The great principle which identifies them with the community of God's people, is precisely the same as that which binds together the actual population of heaven. "Sometime," that is, once, they were far off, but now, by the blood of Christ, the medium of reconciliation, they are "brought nigh," incorporated with the heavenly commonwealth, so as to be made foreigners in the world where they were once accredited citizens; and citizens in the kingdom of heaven, in respect to which, they were once, aliens and enemies. This

transfer of allegiance from other sovereigns to God, this extinguishment of other affinities in order to the engrafting of himself as a vital and organized member, upon the body of Christ's people, this change is assumed, clearly, in the case of every man who says of himself, "my conversation is in heaven." And it is a change which implies a conversion, extending to the very foundation of his nature; a change which amounts to an entire surrender of the heart to God; a change which the Apostle does not hesitate to say constitutes the subject of it, "a new creature," a new man; because his whole life, internal and external, passes under the dominion of a new principle or law. What a process of naturalization does in changing the political condition and relation of the subject of it, a process of regeneration does for the man who becomes a citizen of heaven. "Old things are passed away—behold all things are become new!" There has been a transition from one state of being into another as marked as that which a man raised from the dead would have undergone. As the Apostle affirms in so many words when he says to the Romans, "know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism, into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

As a counterpart to this fact of a supreme consecration to God, we may notice now, the posture in which the man whose conversation is in heaven, stands towards the world in which he is actually resident. As already several times remarked, that posture will be that of a foreigner. It will make him different from the citizen of the world, first, in respect to the acknowledgement of the world's authority. This, in the case of the citizen of the world, is absolute. It was expressed boldly in Pharaoh's question, "who is the

Lord, that I should obey him?" In the Christian it is expressed in modified terms—terms so carefully modified that they always maintain intact the supremacy of God over the conscience and the life. And where a collision occurs between the authority of God and the authority of the world, the Christian will reverse the question of Pharaoh as boldly as he uttered it, and ask, "what is the world that I should obey it?" Only in so far as the world's behests and customs run parallel with duty to God, will he regard them. "My allegiance is due to Him," is his simple principle; and if the behests and customs of the world make me violate that, I must withdraw myself from their operation; or if this be impossible, I must defy them and take the consequences."

And so, secondly, his posture as a citizen of heaven will include a difference between him and the man of the world in respect to the degree in which his affections are given up to the things of the world. The traveler passes through a foreign land, says habitually of the things he sees, "they are not mine. They belong to a race with whom I have no part, nor inheritance." He does not suffer his heart, therefore, to linger among them, to fasten upon them. What is admirable in them he admires; what is innocent in them he is free to enjoy; what he is obliged to ask from them in the way of refreshment, he takes; but all in the temper of the stranger whose intercourse with them is casual and transient, and who feels, perpetually, the force of a law upon his soul forbidding it to ally itself with them. An inward monitor sits within his breast, to check the act, whenever the outgoings of his heart would seek inordinately a union with the world, with the words, "if ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which be above, where Christ sitteth, on the right hand of God!" "Set your affection on

things above, not on things on the earth, for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ, in God!"

Such a posture maintained towards the world, includes in it, of course, that precise mode of living which the Apostle had in his eye when he used the word, conversation, in the text. Being a citizen of heaven, the man's conversation, or mode of living will correspond with that fact. He will mind heavenly things, just as the citizen of the world minds earthly things. His deportment and policy in life will be such as accords with his citizenship, and will reveal, unmistakably, that citizenship. The Jewish council had no difficulty, after a few minutes' interview, in determining of Peter and John, that they had been with Jesus. They inferred it from their manner, their language, their ideas and plans. They saw the spirit of Jesus so palpably transfused into them, that they could not doubt they were countrymen and kinsmen of his; that they were one with him in spiritual lineage and confederation. You do not find any difficulty in recognizing the foreigner who may have been thrown with your company. You notice in him a cast of character, a national individuality which betrays, after a little observation perhaps, his origin. In what he thinks, what he relishes, what he does, in his tastes, habits, pursuits, his peculiarities of mind and demeanor, you will have a clue which can hardly fail to guide you to the quarter whence his citizenship has been derived. So, the Christian will evince, by his habitual walk, and the form and bent of his mindings, his likings, his choosings, his strivings and seekings, his schemings and behavings, that his citizenship is in heaven, that his relation to the present world is that of a foreigner who feels that his connection with the things around him is brief and superficial, and that the objects which are entitled to his chief regard are located in a distant sphere. And so, his conversation is in heaven, because

it is a consistent and practical exposition of the fact that he is a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth, and a citizen of heaven. He acts his part in the world in such a cautious manner, with such moderation of spirit, and such a conscientious reserve, with such a subordination of all his works and endeavors to the end of maintaining a good name, a good estate, and a good hope, as a member of the kingdom of Christ, that no one can fail to take knowledge of him that his citizenship is in that kingdom. The prominence which the Apostle gives to this feature of the Christian life, shows us, my brethren, what deep significance he was accustomed to attach to it; and commends it, very particularly, to our consideration. Your conversation determines the order or type of your citizenship. Your minding and your walking will indicate the plane in which your living lies. If these are occupied supremely about earthly things, then your living is identified with the earth, and your citizenship must be in the earth. You cannot, surely, expect your claim to be a citizen of heaven to be allowed, when your conduct is giving an unequivocal testimony to the fact that your attachments and your interests are all on the side of the world. If you were to exhibit such a recreancy to your nationality as a member of any human government, you would be called a traitor. Remember, then, that the proof of that citizenship in heaven which can entitle you to be called a Christian, is a conversation corresponding with that citizenship, a conversation in heaven!

A further evidence of this citizenship, I may now remark, is to be found in the disposition of a person to entrust his hopes and interests to such securities as are furnished by the kingdom of God. You invest your property where you suppose it to be safest. You lodge your goods in the custody of those in whom you put credit. The foreign trader makes good his claim to citizenship under the

government from which he has come, by converting the profits of his trading into the currency of that country; and conveying them to the fiscal agencies which it employs for safekeeping. In other words, he goes abroad to get his earnings, but sends them home for deposit. You will make good your claim to the character of a Christian by devoting the labors of the present life to the acquisition of treasure in heaven. There is a meat which perisheth, the Saviour tells us, and there is a meat which endureth unto everlasting life. The one is the gratification which the world gives its votaries here; the other is the enjoyment consequent upon a life spent in the service of Christ, to be experienced hereafter. According as one's citizenship is located in the here, or the hereafter, will he be disposed to seek a return for his means and resources in the gratifications of the world, or in the enjoyments of a future state. You will naturally aim to have your wealth placed under the same shelter to which you have committed yourself; identified, so to speak, with the same region and government with which you have identified yourself. Are you a citizen of heaven, occupying the position of a foreigner here on the earth? Then you may, fairly, be challenged to verify your character by showing in your scheme of life, that you are laboring for a treasure which is to be possessed in that locality with which you are permanently connected, and not in that in which you have only a wayfarer's interest. The Christian's thrift is a thrift governed by his citizenship, and hence directed to the accumulation of a property which may serve him in heaven, rather than that whose use is confined to this world. This was the thrift recommended by the Saviour in his parable of the unjust steward, when he subjoined the counsel to his disciples, "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" (or earthly riches) "that when ye fail," (or are dislodged from your

present abode) "they may receive you into everlasting habitations!" And this was the thrift which Paul desires Timothy, so urgently, to inculcate, when he writes, "charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

And to this, add now, as the last point in the exposition of this citizenship which I shall have time to notice, that the person claiming it may be expected to exhibit a certain harmony of character with heaven, and a certain outlook or tendency of the soul towards heaven, as the ultimate goal of his desires. Surely, the foreigner, by the mere act of confessing himself a foreigner, is avowing a personal and sensible interest in his own land, and is giving evidence of a certain abiding sympathy with it in his heart. You have heard of the Swiss soldiers thrown into fever, and dying even, under the effect of the hearing of one of their national songs, when far from their Alpine home. Some such species of association, some such vital chord, must intervene between the Christian and his home in heaven; and through that as a medium, plastic and attractive forces from heaven must be perpetually moving and acting upon heart, as the breathings of the air touch and vocalize the strings of the Æolian harp. And the effect appears in what I have described as a certain harmony of character with, and a certain tendency of soul towards heaven. The presence of such a harmony and such a tendency is clearly alluded to by the Apostle when he speaks of Christians becoming "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light," and being made

“partakers of the Divine nature;” and when he represents the ancient believers as “desiring a better country, even a heavenly,” and as “looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Such results so naturally follow the sense of citizenship in heaven, in the heart, that we are warranted in concluding that when they do not appear in some form or degree, the claim to such citizenship must be, at least, equivocal. Can the foreigner be honest in continuing to bear that character, unless he is careful to cherish the distinctive traits of the national family to which he belongs? And unless he keeps warm and vigorous the tie of kinship which invites him to it? Are you, Christian, really a stranger and a pilgrim here in your present place of sojourn, and is there no effort of the soul to shape itself after the dear ideal of the actual citizen of that heaven which you call your country? And no yearnings of the soul going out towards that country, and grasping it by anticipation as your own? This cannot be. And if you are conscious of no such effort and no such yearning, there is reason to fear you are a foreigner in the world only in name, and are so really identified with the world that you have no model to aspire after, and no home to desire better than what the world affords you.

And now, dear brethren, let me close this review of the features which mark the citizen of the heavenly kingdom with this admonition: Remember that if the portrait we have drawn is to be verified in you, you must stand on higher ground than that occupied by the man of natural or acquired morality, or of the man who fulfills the letter of the law in the matter of outward religious observances. A citizen of heaven! That is the grand attribute, the essential privilege and glory of the Christian. To be in the world, and yet not of the world; to bear about with one the loneliness of the stranger’s lot, and yet, carry in one’s

own hand the royal patent which attests him as the kinsman of the population of the skies; to walk amidst earthly pomps and potencies, and smile as one thinks how insignificant this pageant compared with the Fatherland of God's children; to go through scenes of lowly toil or pining grief and be able to reflect, this is the sowing of tears which will yield me a harvest of joy, and the refiring of the flame which will make the gold brighter in my crown, this is the high distinction which enobles God's saints in their present pilgrim state! It is a distinction which Jesus, in the Gospel, offers to all. The heirs of sin and death may all be enrolled in the Book of Life! Think of this, ye weary and heavy-laden servants of the world! The registry of heaven's citizenship is lying open before you, ready to admit your names! "Whosoever will let him come." Behold, yet there is room," is the invitation. O my unconverted friends, once more listen to these overtures of mercy!

Seize the kind promise while it waits,
And march to Zion's heavenly gates!
Believe, and take the promised rest!
Obey, and be forever blest!



JACOB'S LADDER,

AUGUST. 10, 1851.

“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”—GENESIS 28:12.

THIS dream which Jacob had on his way to Padan-aram was an extraordinary method of intimating to him various things, which God saw fit at that juncture to make known to him. Revelations were thus frequently granted to the patriarchs and holy men of old in the night-visions. A dream, which is ordinarily the least substantial and authentic of all things, was made the vehicle of communicating to their minds the most important messages from heaven; their minds in such cases having been prepared, doubtless to apprehend the Divine source and credible nature of the communication. The point of time, at which God appeared to Jacob, as recorded in the text, is a matter that needs to be kept in view in interpreting the vision which he saw in his dream. At this point, Isaac, we may say, retires from the page of sacred history. We have no further mention of him, except the brief passage at the close of the 35th chapter, which tells of his death and burial. His agency in the field of events, with which the church was connected, and the scheme of human redemption involved, terminated here; Jacob now takes his place. He passes now from his position as a private personage into that of a public or official one. The great promise of a

Messiah which was the hope of the world, here attaches itself to him, as a new link in the chain of instruments by means of which God was bringing about its fulfillment. There was therefore, we can see, a special fitness in his being recognized just here in his new character, and inaugurated, as it were, with his new office. At the same time there were many things in his situation, viewed merely as a private individual at this juncture, which furnished a very adequate occasion for the interposition of God. He was standing at the threshold of active and independent life, though his years must have been far in advance of those which now mark the line between youth and manhood. His worldly fortunes were now for the first time suspended upon his own single arm. He was a wanderer too, fleeing from his home and compelled to endure the hardships of a solitary journey, and an exile of unknown length from his kindred, in order to escape the vengeance of his infuriated brother. If he had repented of the wrong he had done, in deceiving his father, as we may reasonably suppose, and if God were pleased to manifest to him, again, the tokens of his favor; now evidently was the time, when he needed all the comfort and assurance which a communication from heaven might impart. The revelation which was made to him, was designed and adapted to meet his case in all these particulars.

In the course of his journey to Padan-aran; probably at the end of his first day's progress, he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night; making the ground his bed, and a heap of stones his pillow. Outwardly, his condition at this moment indicated anything else, but the fact that he was an object of the peculiar favor of heaven. But while he slept, his soul was rapt into a scene widely different from that which his waking eyes would have beheld. He saw the heavens above him opening, and an ob-

ject (which from its use, probably, rather than its appearance) is called in the sacred narrative, a ladder, descending until its foot rested upon the earth beside him. Along this radiant track instantly appeared a company of celestial travelers, the angels of God, ascending and descending. Their glorious forms passing downward and upward in a continuous column, seemed doubtless, to the patriarch's sight to be weaving a girdle of living light between earth and heaven. They filled up the interval which naturally seems to lie between those two worlds, bridging over as it were, with their shining ranks the chasm that before had divided the abode of man from the home of God, and thus bringing the two localities into conjunction and harmony. What were the impressions made upon Jacob's mind by this wonderful vision, we can only partially determine, but with the aid of scripture we can perhaps, decipher a few of the meanings it was intended to convey. It has been common to regard it as a symbolical representation of the Providence of God, and of the peculiar share which Jacob had in the care and supervision of that providence. And this it did no doubt indicate. But it seems to me, that the use of the vision is only half explained by making it thus a symbol of divine Providence merely. There was something lying back of Providence, and upon which the peculiar agency of Providence toward Jacob was based, which was also meant to be illustrated, and which ought to be considered as the primary object of the vision. Jacob, let it be remembered, was now the representative of a line of persons and of a chosen people, with whom God had been pleased to enter into covenant. That covenant contemplated as its result, not only the making this line of persons, or this chosen people, the objects of his favor; but the making them the channel and outward apparatus, so to speak, by which his favor should be manifested toward the whole apostate family

of man. The covenant which God made with the Patriarchs contained as its great capital blessing the promise of a Redeemer. In that point all its rays of mercy converged. This the New Testament writers clearly show. They affirm over and over again, that just those identical benefits, which it was the business of the gospel, which they preached, to offer to the world (benefits which were all based upon the redemption effected by Christ) were what had been pointed out and intended in all those declarations of God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that "in them and their seed should all the families of the earth be blessed." The result, therefore to which the covenant made with these ancient servants of God always had reference, was the benefits which should accrue to the world, through this Redemption. These benefits are summed up in reconciliation to God. "God was in Christ" says the apostle, explaining Redemption in a single sentence, "reconciling the world unto himself." Reconciliation operates to unite parties, who have formerly been separated. In the case before us, it operates to change the attitude and character of men as a race in rebellion against God, and to remove the causes which made it proper and necessary in God to withdraw his favor from men. Its effect is to open a channel of friendly intercourse between earth and heaven, to fasten a girdle as it were, around these two severed territories, and to join them again in relations of amity and concord. Now the vision which appeared to Jacob in his dream may, I think without any stretch of fancy, be taken as a symbolic representation of the grand comprehensive result, which was to be effected through Christ, that is, the reconciliation of the world to God, the re-establishing of harmony between man and the throne of his sovereign from which he had been separated by revolt. The vision thus illustrates fitly what was signified by that promise which God in immediate connection with it proceeded to

make to Jacob, "in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And in this view of it, too, we see a ground for that reference to this vision of Jacob's and that comparison of himself to the ladder, which the Saviour obviously intended to make, when he said to his disciples, "hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." What Jacob saw symbolized in his vision of the ladder and the attending incidents, Christ says his disciples should see realized. actually fulfilled, in the effect of his personal appearance upon earth. The son of man, like that ladder, should bridge the chasm that had previously divided the abode of fallen man from the home of a holy God. He should remove the wall of partition, the causes of separation, between them. He should draw down the beneficent powers of heaven to cheer the darkness of earth with their glory, and he should open a new and living way of access into the presence chamber of a propitiated Divinity.

What Jacob had presented to his mind therefore in this vision, if this view of it be correct, was a type or figure of the blessings which was designed for him and ultimately for all the world, in the covenant which God had made with his father, and which he was now about to renew with himself. Like Abraham, he may be said here, to have seen the day of Christ. He heard in anticipation the song of "peace on earth and good will toward man," sung by the angels of God. He beheld a ladder to the skies planting itself beside the spot where humanity lay, passive and helpless in its fall. We may say therefore, that the first design of his vision was to set before him a striking representation of the blessings of the new covenant which God had established with man, in Christ, who was to be his seed according to the flesh.

And this symbolical revelation to him, of the ground upon which God's favor was to be bestowed upon man, exhibited a ground, too, for other blessings, which were embraced in the signification of his vision. The God who had thus appeared entering into covenant with him, in Christ and opening heaven as it were, to shed upon him the light of his reconciled countenance; might well be expected to appear as his helper, and protector, and comforter, in his seasons of present distress. And here comes in the bearing of the vision upon what we call the Providence of God. Jacob, first, is exhibited as being taken into covenanted relation to God, so as to be made an object of that peculiar favor which is founded upon the redemption of Christ, and the reconciliation effected by it; and then, he appears as taken under the care of Providence and made an object of Divine favor, so far as that favor is connected with benefits in this life. God says to him, not only "in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," but "I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land, for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Now, all the temporal blessings involved in these promises (and which followed reasonably upon the covenanted relation in which he now stood toward God) were meant, I suppose, to be confirmed and symbolized, also, in his vision. God was thereby shown to him as a God near at hand and not afar off; and the angels of God particularly exhibited to him as an emblem of the strength and power which were engaged to serve him. The fitness of the emblem appears from the way in which these exalted beings are always spoken of in Scripture. Thus they are described by the Psalmist as "they that excel in strength." God often does not deem it unworthy of himself to associate them with him in order to make a more imposing show

of his omnipotence and greatness, and calls himself, "the Lord, or Jehovah of hosts," The angels are again said to be his "ministers that do his pleasure" and to be "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Their presence on this occasion, was therefore an exhibition made to Jacob for his comfort and assurance, of the energies of God that were ready to be employed in fulfilling his promises. Strength, vigilance, sympathy, friendly guardian-ship; in a word, the combined resources and powers of an angelic army prepared to fly from heaven to earth, and earth to heaven to execute their sovereign's command; are here set before him, as a security for all that God had engaged to do for him.

And what a strange contrast such a spectacle presented to the position which he would have seemed to an observer at that moment to have been in! On the one side lay the patriarch, a solitary wanderer, without a human face to smile upon him, or an arm on earth upon which he could lean. But on the other side were bright winged messengers from the skies, hovering about his resting place, and furnishing him with a band of attendants such as outshone the retinue of Kings. On the one side was weakness, on the other was the might of principalities and powers in heavenly places. On the one side was poverty, on the other, the voice of God declaring "the land whereon thou liest to thee will I give it and to thy seed;" and the mystic ladder pointing up to a better land on high. On the one side, in a word, was the world of sense, desolate, perilous and dark; on the other, was the world of faith, glowing with the presence of a smiling God, peopled with the bright forms of angel friends, and stretching away in dazzling perspective, into the glory of heaven.

Here then briefly developed we may say, are a few tangible points, which we may discover in this vision of Jacob's.

God appears in it, meeting him at an important juncture in his life, and enters into covenant with him; and in order to prepare him for the new relation and position, reveals to him first, the grand blessing to which the covenant had reference, which was the reconciliation of the world to himself, and then holds out to him a pledge and type of the providential blessings, which, as a consequence of his own interest in the covenant, were engaged to him. Without dwelling longer upon the import of the vision, as it concerned Jacob, let me now, take this incident in his history, explained as it has been, as an illustration of a few things in God's dealings with men in general.

I see in it, much that resembles his way of approaching and addressing those, who, like Jacob are standing at the starting point of their active life, with the world all before them, inviting them to chose their path and win their prizes. Cutting loose the ties of pupilage and dependence, which have hitherto held him in salutary restraint, I see the youth going forth alone, to meet and make his fortune. Whither shall he turn his steps? What goal shall be set before him? What clue shall he find to direct him through the labyrinthine scene before him, to the spot where happiness shall reward his search? His heart is full of airy images. Schemes, and conjectures; and hopes crowd upon his mind at every pause in his eager march. And then it is, that a vision like that of the text, breaks in upon his dreams. God plants as it were, right across his path, a ladder, whose top reaches to heaven, and upon it the angels seem to come down to win him back with them to the skies. Such a vision may be said to come to him in every means and method which God employs to make him sacrifice earthly good for heavenly, and choose the way of piety instead of those of worldliness and sin. The Gospel, wherever it is known, is accustomed thus to meet the young; and to seize

some season of silence and rest to propose to them the covenant in which God offers them his favor freely in Christ, and engages to give them support, and protection, and comfort, as they need them on earth. "Seek first, the kingdom of God and his righteousness" it says to them, "and all these things shall be added unto you." Choose Christ, as your way, your ladder; and heaven as your destination, and all that the angels represented to Jacob, will be yours. The strength, the love, the care, the sympathy of the Lord of hosts, will be secured to you. All things shall work together for your good. Many a young person, who feels, day by day, that he is getting more and more immersed in the world; advancing farther and farther into its business and excitement and cares, has seen in his dreams, or the serious thoughts that have visited him upon his pillow; this vision of the ladder standing in his path, has heard in his heart this call of God to him, to make his peace with him to secure his favor as the only true security for happiness and prosperity; and has marked, perhaps, among the angels hovering about the ladder, the forms of sainted parents and friends beckoning him to join them in their heavenly home. Such visions do recur continually in the experience of the young; and never finally leave them, till they have driven them away by willful and protracted resistance. And it indicates an alarming maturity in guilt, and a long departure from the way of happiness when these images of the Saviour, the true ladder that would lead them to heaven, meet them in their dreams no more. The world may seem to smile upon them, and what they call fortune to favor them and a temporary prosperity reward their efforts, but there is nothing of God's favor in all this; and without that there is no stable, no real happiness. Happiness, aside from the covenant which binds God to us as a friend, happiness which has not its basis and spring in those resources of Di-

vine power and wisdom and love and care which the covenant secures to us, is an illusion, which may charm for a season, but must be dissipated at last. It is a cup of sweet poison ; and though it may intoxicate for a while, there is bitterness and pain and death in it in the end. I charge you, therefore, my hearers, those of you who are still young, not to let the happiness which an irreligious life offers you, begile you beyond the spot where the ladder and the angels, where the favor and the blessings of the covenant, are standing before you, and inviting you to the arms of a reconciled God, and to the glories of heaven.

I see, too, in this vision of Jacob an illustration of the condition of the child of God in a season of trial and affliction. From the sweet home, where his heart had nestled, he has been driven out by some invading sorrow, and he wanders now in solitude, and sleeps on the stony couch which grief had spread for him. His heart too is full of dreams ; dreams of the past and the lost, dreams of want and suffering in a cheerless future. But behold in the midst of his dream, God brings to view the ladder ; and on the dark earth, its radiant foot is set, and in the bright heavens its lofty top is lost, and upward and downwards along its shining track the angels, symbols all of God's strength, and love, and care, and sympathy, and pledged to him in the covenant, and ministers all, of hope, and peace, and consolation, are gliding in noiseless procession. The sight tranquilizes his spirit, and charms it out of its gloom. It shows him that God is his, reconciled in Christ. It tells him what divine resources are his. It animates him with a courage, a force, and sustains him with a power which nature knew nothing of. Nothing has ever so taught him nothing can ever so teach us, what a refuge and support we have in God, as affliction does. Christ then in reality becomes our ladder, through whom our sorrowing spirits escape

from the cares and the woes of earth, to shelter themselves in the bosom of our Father, God. And the promises, come down to us like descending angels, and leave the heavens open as they come; till over the scene of sanctified sorrow, we can exclaim with Jacob, "surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. This is none other, but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." It must be a hard thing to have to wander in the solitudes of bereavement, or sleep on the stony pillow of care and want, without this vision of the ladder and the angels, without the provision of the covenant, and the love and faithfulness of a reconciled God, to rest upon. But this is what God never means his children to do. It is a part of his covenant to smite and chasten them when they need it; but it is equally a part of his covenant to keep the floods from overflowing them, and the flame from kindling upon them; and no part of his covenant will ever fail through any fault of his. "In the world ye shall have tribulations," said Christ "but be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world." I have planted a ladder, upon which, the angels come down, and over which the heavenly glory shines in every path of sorrow, and my people have but to open their eyes to behold the cheering vision."

I may now go further and find an analogy between the vision of Jacob, and the condition of the believer at his dying hour. He then lies down, after the weary day's journey of life is over. His bed is a hard one, a comfortless one in the eye of nature; for nature does not love to die. And there are anxious dreams, which are apt to trouble the soul of one just sinking into this last repose; dreams of duties left undone, and sins committed at every step of his journey, dreams of what shall be for the loved ones to be left on earth, and dreams of what shall be for himself, in the dread eternity before him. But, behold, upon the very

grave, God shows the ladder resting its foot ; and its outline rises through the gloom, a clear bright pathway to the skies ; and the angels are there to meet the departing spirit and lead it up triumphant to the heavenly mansions. The dying believer rests upon Christ, according to the covenant, and sees God reconciled. Sin he has, but the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The law would condemn him, but Christ has died to satisfy the law. He must wander from his home in the body, but to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. His flesh must go down to the tomb, but Christ is the resurrection and the life, and of the very dust which entombs him. God seems to say, as he did of the soil upon which Jacob slept "the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it," for the grave belongs to the saint, whose body it must keep for the hour of restitution, rather than he to it.

But still another analogy it may be useful to notice, is one which may be traced between the case of Jacob and that of any sincere devoted philanthropic laborer in the work of rescuing the world from the dominion of error and sin. I might instance particularly the case of the missionary, who goes out, literally from home into the desolate wastes of the earth ; and most generally perhaps closes his daily toil with a heavy heart, and lies down to dream of scenes of wickedness around him, and of his own baffled efforts to draw the heathen to the feet of Christ. But we need not particularize. As I have said, any true hearted, earnest, devoted laborer for the cause of Christ and of human salvation will furnish the analogy to the case of Jacob which I wish to point out. It is a long and weary way, that such a person is called to travel. Day by day, he must tread the path of self-denial ; and disappointed hopes, and unrequited toil, must spread his painful couch at night. His heart, too, is full of dreams, and they are sad ones.

They are occupied with reflections upon his own weaknesses and infirmities, upon the gigantic wickedness that prevails in the world; upon the injustice and ingratitude of those whom his heart yearns to bless and save; upon the countless obstacles that oppose the spread of the Gospel, upon the little impression that the truth seems to make in the world, and upon the boldness and confidence of the enemies of Christ; and his spirit almost sinks within him; and he would fain fly from the field and desert the hopeless warfare. But in the midst of these dreams, behold, God shows him the ladder, and the angels ascending and descending upon it. That is the symbol of the covenant, which declares that the world for which Christ died belongs to him, and shall be given to him; and it cheers the despondent dreamer like a charm. It repeats to him the words of promise, "in thee and thy seed, shall all the families of the world be blessed," and "thou shalt spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south." It shows him, too, that Divine resources are enlisted in the cause he is laboring to promote, that it is not in his own strength that he labors, but that Christ has said "I am with you to the end of the world;" and angelic warriors are his allies and supporters. He sees heaven planting its ladder upon the apostate earth in token of possession and the vision reassures his faith, and encourages him with fresh ardor to rise from his dreams and finish the work his master has given him to do.

And finally let me say, in a general way, as a truth which concerns us all, that life itself is a dream. Viewed in reference to the things which occupy it here, it is fitly called a dream. How often we look back upon the past, and say of its varied scenes and events, they seem to us a dream. And years hence, if we live so long, and if we have lived only for this world, we shall have to say from

our dying bed, "life has been but a dream." Its joys have come and gone, and they are now nothing more to us than the joys of a dream. Wealth, genius, beauty, the triumphs of ambition, the pleasures of society, the struggles for office and power; the delights of home; the love of husband or wife; all, all, were dreams. And having so lived the life of a dreamer, we must begin the life of a waking man in that eternity for which we are all unprepared. Oh what a vain show we are walking in, who are thus dreaming away the life God gave us for a real use, and a real end. Let the vision of Jacob remind us of the direction this life-dream ought to take in order to conform to the will of God in giving us life. Behold the ladder, mounting from earth to heaven. There is no right plan of life, dear friends, which does not terminate upon that object. God and all pure beings are calling our souls upward. It is only devils and the passions that link us to the brutes, that would keep them groveling here upon the earth. God bids you live for immortality; live so that you can always be said, like Jacob, to be encamped at the gate of heaven! You are never living right, till the vision of that ladder, and its angels has become as familiar to you, and as constant an object of your perception, as the beating of your own heart; till, in other words, you are living by faith upon Jesus Christ, and the eternal covenant confirmed in him, and living so, that at whatever spot the death slumbers may overtake you, the angel of the covenant may be there, and the ladder all set; and God prepared to welcome you to the glories of his kingdom.



THE SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN.

AUGUST 21, 1861.

“Then Jesus answered and said unto her: ‘O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.’ And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”—MATTHEW 15-28.

THE narrative of this Syro-Phœnician woman’s interview with our Lord, and of the miracle to which it was introductory, presents us with a phase of our Savior’s ministry, entirely unique; and records some incidents which entitle his conduct on the occasion, to particular attention.

First, it is to be noticed that the scene of action was different from that to which our Lord’s labors were ordinarily restricted. For the first and only time, he appears here carrying his healing office into the domain of the Gentile world. He had been for some time traversing the province of Galilee, when, without assigning any reason for the movement, the history tells us, he departed thence into the coast or borders of Tyre and Sidon. This took him into Phœnicia, which was a distinct country from Palestine, but like it, comprehended within the larger kingdom of Syria. When the Saviour, therefore, passed into the borders of Phœnicia, he had stepped upon Pagan soil, and had put himself in contact with an accursed heathen race. This was a digression from his ordinary course, and the only one of the kind which occurs in his history. There was doubtless a reason for so exceptional a procedure. In a work so very definite as that which our Lord came to

perform on earth, there could have been nothing done at random; there could have been no incoherencies, or casualties, such as appear in the lives of common men. The journey into Phœnicia, we may be sure, had a design at the bottom of it; and this design, we may conjecture, to have been twofold. First, our Saviour wished by this act to give an illustrative notice of the ultimate destination of the benefits of his Messiahship to the Gentile nations. While in compliance with the policy of the Old Dispensation under which he appeared he acted ordinarily upon the principle that "Salvation was of the Jews," and confined his ministry to the chosen seed, he saw fit, once during his earthly sojourn, to make a display of his saving power within the domain of heathendom. He would send one ray of light into the realms of darkness, to show that the light could penetrate even that gloomy region, and that the scope of redemption was only temporarily confined to the limits of the literal Israel. Before he left the world, he would make one visit of mercy into the territory that had apparently been abandoned to Satan, to give token of the coming overthrow of his empire. He would make one breach in the wall of partition between the circumcision and uncircumcision as an earnest of the total demolition of that wall, which was to be effected through the Gospel. He would for a single moment open the dungeon-door of the fettered bondsman, and send through his long palsied heart the thrill of the hope of liberty.

In this view of it this excursion into Phœnicia was an act of magnificent import.

But beyond this general design, I suppose, there was another object of a more private kind contemplated by the Saviour in this excursion. There was a poor, wandering sheep, there in the mountains, whom the good Shepherd was eager to save. There was a soul there who had been,

in a measure, prepared by the providence of God to acknowledge him as the Messiah, whom he would seek and lead into his fold. It looks to us like an accident that he and the Canaanitish woman were brought together, but I do not believe there was any accident about it. Her condition was known to Jesus before he started from Galilee; and he made the long journey (for the journey was a long one) that he might minister to her necessities. She had a heavy grief upon her heart in the miserable calamity which had befallen her daughter; and this he proposed to relieve. But I imagine this was only a subordinate object with our Saviour. The mother herself, was to be made a miracle of grace—to be translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. The state of mind which she evinced when she came to Christ, I think, indicates that she was prepared to be the subject of such a process; and the whole procedure of Christ towards her, I regard, as having been determined by his view of her spiritual condition, and his knowledge of the treatment which was necessary to consummate her conversion; and it is, certainly, a conclusion which the mind can hardly refrain from adopting, after witnessing such an interview, that this woman ever after, must have been a devout and sincere believer in Jesus. We cannot doubt that when the Saviour returned from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, there had been a new name recorded on the roll of the heirs of glory. And this view of it, gives to the affair of his excursion into Phœnicia a significance hardly less imposing, than that contained in the former view of it. The grace that could descend so far, in order to deliver a single soul from sin and hell, appears in a form hardly less grand, and if possible, even more tender than when it disclosed itself as embracing the Gentile as well as the Jewish nations in the scope of its merciful purpose. I do not know that our blessed

Lord ever made a more affecting exhibition of his benevolence—ever threw out into bolder relief the Divine attribute of Love which was the animating element of his character, than just here, in this incident, in the light in which I have now been contemplating it.

And now, a second feature to be noticed in this narrative, is the manner of our Saviour's action in his interview with the Canaanitish woman. For once his customary benignity seems to forsake him. On no other occasion did the sufferer fail to meet with a kind reception at his hands. Here, and only here, he appears turning a deaf ear to the cry of distress, closing his heart against the eloquence of tears, and sharpening rather than soothing the pangs that wrung a torn and bleeding breast. It is a strange position to find the merciful Jesus in; and yet, as the end of the transaction demonstrated, one that was entirely consistent with the spirit he came to express, and the ends he habitually consulted in his ministry.

To see this we must look a little in detail at the facts of the case. Upon our Lord's arrival within the borders of Tyre and Sidon, a woman (hastening from the interior of the country, probably,) presented herself before him. You have already heard who this woman was as to national character; she was a native of the country—a heathen, therefore, and most likely, had been an idolatress; one who had not only denied the God of Israel, but had worshipped false gods. But she had a woman's heart; and under the arrangement of Providence, she had been made to feel in the keenest form the bitterest anguish of a woman's heart—the pain of witnessing incurable suffering in a beloved child. Her daughter (Mark tells us she was young,) was “grievously vexed with a devil.” Probably no worse affliction could have befallen her. The nature of the disorder so often spoken of in the New Testament as a demoniacal

possession, is inexplicable by us. No such phenomenon is witnessed in our day, at least in the degree in which it was witnessed in our Saviour's day. It seems to have been a species of Satanic agency which was allowed by God to take its place amongst the ills to which humanity was liable, at the precise period of Christ's sojourn on earth, as a special index, both of the malignity with which the seed of the "serpent" was disposed to persecute the fallen race of man, and of the triumphant power with which Christ, the "seed of the woman" was armed in order to defeat him. The allusions to it in the Scriptures, show clearly the presence and agency in the subject of it, of a personal tormentor. Body and mind were both subjected to the evil power. The sufferer was more than a sick man; he was a man tortured by a fiend—harassed by the cruel arts of an irresistible enemy, always present with him. Of course, medicine could do no good in such a case. The cause lay above the range of human science and skill, in the regions of superhuman essences and influences. Enough may be conceived, therefore, of the condition of the demoniac girl to enable us to comprehend something of her own misery, and something of the despair and woe of the helpless mother.

And now, she hears, through the rumors probably, which were blown around and in advance of him, that Jesus had crossed from Galilee into the borders of Phœnicia. She had heard of him before; her conduct shows this. Indeed, his fame had spread everywhere, and accordingly he never went anywhere without being besieged immediately by a crowd of supplicants, asking for themselves or their friends, some exercise of his miraculous powers. The woman of Canaan seems to have informed herself pretty accurately concerning his claims, and the objects of his mission. It would even appear that she recognized him as the Messiah

whom the Jews had long been expecting, and that her idea as to who and what the Messiah was, was to a great degree, correct. This accounts for the propriety of the title which she applied to him: "O Lord, thou Son of David." These terms were derived from the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures; and when applied to Jesus, they expressed the conviction, on the part of the person using them, that he was all that these terms used by the prophets indicated. In other words, he was the Messiah of God. Who, and what this Messiah was, was a question which was answered with greater or less accuracy by different individuals. Some, in their conception of him, doubtless entertained the complete truth; others rose only part of the way towards a perfect conception of his character. Some regarded him as the "Son of God," in the sense of a divine being, and as a redeemer, in the sense of a deliverer from the dominion of sin and Satan. Others looked upon him as a prophet or messenger from God, commissioned to make an important moral and religious revolution in the Jewish State. Others anticipated in him a political reformer, and supposed that his work would be to emancipate his people from the yoke of foreign bondage, and establish in its ancient glory the throne of David. What the precise views of this Gentile woman were, we cannot tell, but I am disposed to believe, as I have said before, they were to a great degree correct. Whatever they were, they brought her to the Saviour with a desire so intense, and a confidence so strong, that the possibility of a failure in her suit, does not seem to have been admitted by her mind. With an interest in her errand, which amounted to a passion, she throws herself at his feet, crying out in tones which we may well imagine might have melted a heart of stone, "have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David! My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." There were a hundred arguments con-

tained in this short appeal. To the mind of the speaker they were irresistible. She could not doubt the answer which would be returned to them. She watched for the lips to move in response. She panted for the gracious words which should assure her that her daughter was healed. But, strange to say, the countenance of Jesus remained as rigid as iron. The lips were sealed; "he answered her not a word." She waited—moments which are like ages; but no cheering tones greet her ear. There is mercy in the face, there is strength in the arm; are they not forthcoming for her relief? Possibly her cry has been misunderstood. She repeats it. She follows Jesus as he walks, with her importunity, till his disciples, at last, with their sympathies wrought to the highest pitch, interpose, and venture to join their entreaties to hers. "Send her away," they say, "for she crieth after us!" That is, "grant her request, and relieve her distress, and let her cease to pursue us, with these heart-rending appeals!"

And now the lips open. Jesus speaks; but it is only to discourage still more the poor mother's hope. "I am not sent," he says, "but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" as much as to say, "my commission gives this stranger no claim to the benefit of my miraculous power. She is not a daughter of Abraham. She has no part in the covenant of promise. The testimony of my Messiahship is to be laid before the Jew, not the Gentile!" The woman heard these words—saw the barrier they seemed to throw in the way of her object; but the heart, quickened by maternal love, may have suggested to her mind a thought that still kept her from despair. "He is sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But has he not all power as the son of God? May he not in virtue of his own prerogative still decree to work this act of mercy? If not as the messenger to the house of Israel, still as the incarnate Deity,

may he not, can he not in sovereign clemency grant to a suffering creature this little boon? And so she prosecutes her suit; she offers no such argument as this to Jesus, but in the strength which it administered to her own soul, she comes to him again and “worships him”—that is prostrates herself before him—saying, “Lord help me!” But still in vain! His look is still cold—cold as ice. There is another heart-crushing message evidently on his tongue. And now it comes. Turning to her as she lay at his feet, with her eager eye fixed upon him, he says: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” Harsh words, these, to come from those lips! to be spoken by any lips! and in the presence of sorrow so sacred as that of a mother pleading for a suffering child! They seem to us to carry a tone of insult with them, as if the Saviour were adding reproach to his refusal of aid. Severely painful the words were undoubtedly, and designedly humiliating; and yet not insulting—not contemptuous. I cannot so understand any words that Jesus would speak. He only means to remind the woman again, that as a Gentile, her case was not contemplated in his mission in its present stage, and that, therefore, the benefits he had to dispense, belonged to the “children,” the Jews, and not to her alien race. The term, “dogs,” has to our ears an offensive sound, to which it probably is not entitled. In the original it is a diminutive, which may imply insignificance or unworthiness, but, I think, not contemptibleness. It means literally, “little dogs;” and seems to refer to these animals as attached to the family, so that, while the children sit at the table, they are permitted to come under it. Their position is one of inferiority; and though their wants demand attention, it is meet that the children should be provided for first, and that the food which is intended for the sustenance of their children, should not be taken from

them to be wasted upon mere brutes. In this view of his language, the Saviour, without insulting her, seems to have merely designed to represent to the woman in a stronger way, perhaps, than he had done before, the absence of all ground upon which she could claim the favor she asked. Still, what a disheartening view of her forlorn condition it must have given her! She saw the children's portion, and yet was forbidden to partake of it. With wants as keen as hers, and the means of relief in sight, she must lie, as it were, like the dogs under the table, and ask no share in the provision upon it. Attainted heathen—unclean idolatress that she was, what right had she to expect that the mercies granted to God's covenanted people should be diverted from their use to gratify her? And yet, dog though she seemed in her place in the household of God, she could ask a dog's portion, for, in their place, the dogs even were not overlooked in the disbursements of the household-er. She takes the place assigned her, and there, from that lowliest of all lowly attitudes, she makes another appeal to the Saviour. "Truth Lord," she says, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table," as if she had said, "I admit it! I cannot ask the children's bread. I am but a dog in comparison with them; it is not meet that I should intrude into their place, or claim their privilege; but a dog's boon may I not claim? In the overflowing bounty of God towards Israel, manifested in the gift of his son for their redemption, is there not a crumb which can be spared for a poor Gentile woman, groaning under the pressure of Satan's power?" This was enough. Nothing more, apparently, could be asked; no further proof of the existence in the woman of the spirit which Jesus loves to bless could be given. And now, with that look of kindness on his countenance which had been so strangely absent before, he answered and said to her: "O woman, great is

thy faith! Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt!" And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

The event of course affords the solution of this very extraordinary course of treatment which our Lord had pursued towards this Canaanitish woman. There had not been from the first any lack of sensibility or kindly sympathy in his heart; he had not been cold or cruel, nor had he trifled idly with her feelings, nor practiced artifice in his deportment towards her. He had acted as a wise physician, who knew his patient's case, and who had intelligently and seriously adjusted his remedies to the attainment of all the ends embraced in a thorough cure of it. It was necessary, no doubt, for her own good, as her case was apprehended by Jesus, that she should be subjected to precisely this course of trial. Every pang that she underwent, every emotion in the complicated tissue of feeling in which her heart was involved, every struggling step downward in the way of humiliation, or upward in the way of faith, was needed, in order that the healing of her daughter should possess its full value in her eyes, and that other and perhaps greater objects to be effected in connection with this, should be successfully achieved.

And then there were uses to be subserved by her case which had respect to the church of Christ at large. The Saviour was preparing the statute book and the directory of his people in all he did when he was upon earth. He meant this incident with the Canaanitish woman to fill a place in the scriptures which could not have been filled by any incident occurring under other circumstances. The whole transaction happened for your benefit, my brethren, no less than for the family immediately concerned; and it was recorded in the Gospel for the instruction and encouragement of the tried and tempted believer, and the penitent sinner in all generations. We may well thank God,

all of us, I am sure, that it pleased the Lord Jesus thus to go from Galilee into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and there under such peculiar conditions exercise his healing power upon a Canaanitish woman's daughter. Let me devote the remainder of my time to an exposition of the way in which the truths illustrated by this incident may be applied to the cases of men generally.

For instance, has it never seemed to you as if God were dealing with you very much as the Saviour dealt with this woman? Has he never seemed to wear an averted face when you have gone to him in the expectation of obtaining some blessing? Is it not true that God sometimes appears to you a different God from what you expected to find him? Does not his policy in certain junctures disappoint you, and sorely put your faith to the test? In your private experience is not the course of his providential and spiritual operations, in some particulars, quite the reverse of what you had been led to expect? And in the history of the church is there not often a strange holding back of the Saviour's hand in cases where you had confidently expected to see it put forth? Have you not sometimes, when you have gone to Christ with a burden on your heart like this woman's, and with a confidence in his willingness to relieve it, like hers, been met apparently with the same coldness, reluctance and severity which she encountered? I know it is so. I suppose it was to prepare you for the temptations and difficulties of just such an exigency that this woman's story has been preserved in the scriptures; and I would say to you, whenever events under God's government are not turning out as you had hoped and expected, whenever labour fails to effect its anticipated issue, or prayer to receive its appointed reward, remember the Saviour's dealings with the Canaanitish woman. Remember first that God has thus forewarned you that occasions may arise in which he

shall see fit to repulse his people, to contend with them, and to throw discouragement upon their spirits. The mere occurrence of such occasions is not to be considered a phenomenon at variance with his character or policy. It is one for which a precedent may be found here in his own word. Our God is the God of the Bible. As such our faith acknowledges him and confides in him; and our faith must acknowledge him and confide in him just so far as the Bible teaches us to do so. Now the Bible shows us this, God sometimes maintaining an attitude of reserve, and assuming an air of harshness in his treatment of his children. It shows us this in the case of the woman before us. It shows us the same in the absence and tardiness of Jesus when his friend Lazarus was sick. It shows the same where Abraham was suddenly required to sacrifice his son Isaac. Temporary or apparent severity is a thing which may occur in the dealings of God with us. We must not be confounded, nor driven to unbelief when it does occur. Jesus had not changed his character, though his manner towards this poor Gentile was so disheartening. He never does change his character. He may exhibit it under forms which are at times inexplicable to us, but the seeming digression will in the end infallibly be found to be in harmony with the law of his life, and the economy of his kingdom. The Canaanitish woman would not be convinced that Jesus was not the Jesus of whom she had heard. Her heart had embraced the contrary conviction too deeply for anything to shake it. Such confidence in him we ought all to entertain; and after her example and the encouragement contained in her story there ought to be no great difficulty in any circumstances in entertaining it.

Then again, remember that such painful procedures on the part of God may inclose within themselves all the while a purpose to do you the good you seek. You may

seem to be thrust back again and again, while really the design of the hand that strikes you is to bring you nigh and embrace you. Delay in granting a boon, though it may be attended with aggravations which almost break the heart and quench hope, is nevertheless no certain proof of an adverse determination in God. Think of this poor heathen mother, ye mothers, ye parents, who have been long calling apparently upon a deaf ear, and clamoring at a closed gate in your prayers for your offspring! Abraham even under the knife had his son restored to him. Martha and Mary, even from the grave, had their brother returned to their arms. This woman, even after Jesus himself had seemed to rear a triple wall between her and her hope, gained the precious answer—"be it unto thee as thou wilt!"

Remember again, when Jesus hesitates thus with you, shuts the door thus upon your application, it is an indication to you probably that there are arguments required by him at your hands. There is a way in which your case must be set before him, before he can permit it to prevail. His silence, his immobility may be pregnant with suggestions and reflections upon yourself, and may be meant to drive you to deep and honest self-examination, to see whether there may not be some condition to the answering of your prayer yet unfulfilled by you; or some "accursed thing" from which God's blessing is necessarily repelled, cherished by you. Christ may be conferring with you, as an inquisitor, in these bitter moments of suspense, in order to lead you to know yourself, and to acknowledge your delinquencies; to repair your errors, and so to put out of the way things which, while they remain, prevent the access of his mercy. The woman's argument had reference, we should say, to misfortunes rather than faults; but you may have to concern yourself about faults. You must disprove these, and you must do this by the best of arguments, a reform-

ed conduct. You must level the mountains, and raise the valleys, and purge out the thorns and thistles, and so invite the approach of Christ by the openness and the integrity of your heart.

Remember again, Jesus giveth grace to the humble. And what a lesson upon humility does the conduct of this Gentile mother teach! How Christ rings the changes, so to speak, upon her utter want of merit, and right to claim the benefit she sought! How he probes her pride and self-esteem to the quick! And yet how meekly she takes it all! Blast after blast of the rude hurricane strikes upon the frail, bending willow, and lower and lower, at every stroke, it bows, till it lies at last prone upon the earth. She consents to rest her plea upon such a title as the dog under the table might present to his master. She sees the children's privileges set before her without envy or complaint. She asks only the crumbs which are scattered from their superabundance. This is a type, not an exaggerated one, of the spirit and posture which every guilty and attainted child of Adam ought to maintain before God. Till you come to have such humility you are not in a condition to receive the largesses of heaven. The unfallen angels are the children feasting at the table, yonder in the father's house. Sinners on earth are but the dogs under it; and in a temper becoming their place they must ask for the blessing. Jesus may keep them fasting till they are thankful for crumbs; and then he may open to them stores of grace transcending the feast of angels.

And once more, remember, that God requires faith in those whom he receives. Faith will be evinced by the earnestness of the pursuit. The prayer of faith must be an earnest prayer; it will grow out of the reality of a want; and the magnitude of a want. Are our prayers for our children's salvation, prayers of faith think you? Ah, are

they like the poor woman's for her demoniac daughter? Have you ever felt as she did for the demoniac child for whom you profess to pray to God? Have you ever exhibited such earnestness in seeking the conversion of that worldly-minded daughter, or that profligate son, whom Satan has taken captive? Alas! you have not faith; you do not believe in the danger of your child; you do not see its misery as she did, and you do not believe in the necessity and the availability of Christ's office as she did; and so you are not in earnest in your prayer; and Christ waits till you come to him in faith. He waits to make you evince your faith by an importunity which shall tell him that the necessity is desperate, and that your want is such, that like Jacob wrestling all night with the angel, you cannot—will not let him go except he bless you. Alas, for us, dear Christian friends, we may all learn a lesson from the conduct of this Syro-Phœnician woman, and get a rebuke from her too! She gained her daughter, and not improbably gained eternal life at the same time. O had we more of her sincerity and earnestness, her single-minded, practical honesty in seeking the blessings she desired, her humility of spirit, her faith in Jesus, her patience and importunity in prayer, I cannot doubt that more frequently the cold look that now seems to sit upon the Saviour's face would relax into loving smiles, and his voice bear to us too the joyful message, "be it unto thee even as thou wilt."



THE LILY OF THE FIELD.

MAY 2, 1852.

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”—MATTHEW. 6:28.29.

THE particular purpose for which the Saviour alludes to the lily of the field, in the case before us, was to make men recognize the beneficent agency of God as something to be taken into account and depended upon by them, as a means of bodily subsistence and support. He holds up the little flower before them as a witness, and interrogates it, as it were, of the source of its vigorous health and fairy-like comeliness. And the answer that he receives is, that there is an intelligent power external to itself which has made it what it is. It did not toil nor spin. By no skill or industry of its own, it wove its drapery of white and green. But God clothed it. God raised its graceful stem from the soil, and hung over its queenly form a mantle that surpasses the apparel of Solomon in all his glory. Now, the Saviour's argument is, that a power which is seen expending itself in such a way and to such a degree in the case of a flower, ought to be looked to and trusted in by men, as a source from which they too may expect even greater aid. Allowing for all proper differences between the man and the plant, the fact still remains as true in the case of the one as the other, that God can exert an

agency which may materially assist in promoting their security and well-being. The power that decks the lily can give food and raiment to man. And man is as unreasonable, as he is unkind to himself, in throwing out of view this power, when he is estimating the means upon which his hope of having his wants supplied, may rest. His expectation of obtaining aid from God must, of course, recognize the conditions of his nature, as a being possessed of animal and rational life. The plant has everthing done for it, we may say, by its beneficent Creator. Care, and forethought, and labor of its own, are out of the question. But man is so constituted that he can do much for himself. He can exercise intelligent care and prudent forethought, and skillful labor in his own behalf; and it is only in the exercise of all these that he can hope for aid from God. But all these exercised to their utmost, do not alter the fact, nor his interest in the fact, that there is a power external to him, which is able to give him aid. The power that clothes the lilies of the field, is still presented to him as another agency, adequate, just as well, to supply all his wants. And shall he take no note of that power in summing up and collecting together his resources? Because he can do much for himself, shall he deny that God can do anything for him? Shall he make all his faith and hope and trust terminate upon himself, and act as if he had no need of God's aid, while his own faculties can act, or as if no cases could occur in which God's aid could serve him, when his own energies had proved insufficient? Shall he thus make a God of himself, by never looking out of himself, or higher than himself? "Oh, thou of little faith," and of folly as great as thy faith is little, to see this wondrous power all around thee in the world, and beneficently exercised too, and yet refuse to betake thyself to it? To see God clothing the grass of the field without toiling or spinning, and

yet refuse to believe that He can and will aid thee in thy toiling and spinning? Consider the lilies how they grow; and then consider whether it is not a blind and thriftless policy which keeps thee ever trusting to thine own arm and never to the power which makes them grow! The very shrubs and blossoms which thy busy feet are crushing in their restless quest of the things thou shalt eat and drink and put on, condemn thee for thy misspent care and misdirected trust. This useful rebuke of man's atheistical forgetfulness of God, as an agent able and willing to help him, the Saviour draws from a growing flower. Passing on from this lesson, I would find in the same object a type of much else which belongs to the condition and history of man.

Nature ought to be scanned far more than it is by the Christian, with the eye of faith which can see in things earthly, patterns of things heavenly. The visible world is a book of parables; and, he who will carry with him the key of knowledge which Scripture gives, may find it full of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Its forms and figures, as has been beautifully said, are "a sacred writing," the hieroglyphics of God; and the evolutions of beauty and grandeur which are everywhere occurring in it, are the unfolding of his glory,—the rolling out upon the temple floor, or the skirts of his train, whose person sits enthroned in the light inaccessible of heaven. As God is one, unity is to be looked for in his works; and, consequently, agreement and likeness in all his different revelations of himself. And when, therefore, we find the type of some spiritual truth presented to us, in a fact or process of the material world, we have presented to us a new ground for confidence in that spiritual truth. The analogies between nature and the doctrines of the Scripture, as we have them in the Bible, do more, therefore, than gratify our intellect, or please our

fancy. They minister to our growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord, they edify us in our most holy faith; they widen and deepen the foundation of our religion; they elevate the soul by di-closing amidst all things, even the petty and familiar things of life, the beautiful and majestic harmonies of God; and they lift us by the ladder of earthly things to a higher, nearer communication with heaven.

Let us question, then, the lily of its hidden significance, and see what intimations of higher things we may find in the whispers of the grass of the field. And this, not with that vain curiosity which hunts for surprising coincidences, or that more poetic taste which delights in the aptness of a simile, but with a reverent docility that seeks for truth everywhere, and rejoices to find new arguments for its heaven-taught faith, in the manifold imagery of earth.

The growing flower is the product of a seed, buried darkly in the soil. The beginning of all this diversified array of vegetable beauty which now adorns your gardens, and all this wide waving garniture of green which now covers your hills and your vallies, was a germ propelled into motion under ground. Out of that obscure and unsightly bed it has arisen, and erected itself into the plant, the leaf, and the blossom. But in this growth, when we come to trace it through its successive stages, there has been called into action a complicated system of laws, and a wondrous course of forces. The various kinds of operation, the immense exercise of power, and the extensive range of plan and method, which are employed in the causing of the germination of the tiniest plant, is a matter which is fitted to fill the mind with amazement; and (did not the fact forbid all doubt) might well excite the incredulous inquiry "is not this a delusion?" This mighty machinery could never have been constructed for such a result. There is an apparatus

here which might have been used to frame a world. Was it all directed to the production of a lily? But just this, and all this, is nevertheless true; and scepticism is effectually silenced by the unerring disclosures of science. Out of the many facts which these have developed, let me instance one or two, for it is only a scattered paragraph or two out of the beautiful history of vegetable life, which the occasion will allow me to give, I borrow them from "McCosh's Divine Government, Physical and Moral." Consider this then that the annual revolution of the earth about the sun has been arranged so as to aid the growth of every little flower that is blooming at your feet. The seed as it lies in the soil is a dull inert object, which, without the conjunction of certain conditions, has no more power to change than a stone. Heat must first reach it in its hidden bed, and heat in just the right proportion, so that in connection with the moisture of the soil, it may expand and soften the outer coats of the grain, and so prepare the way for the chemical agents which are to quicken and nourish the embryo within. A temperature above or below a specific point would defeat all vital action. Now the course of the earth around the sun has been adjusted with such nice reference to this condition of the vegetable economy that just the ray of the requisite intensity strikes the spot, where the seed is deposited though that spot has been determined by a thing so fitful as the gust of wind, or the flight of the insect by which the seed was borne to the ground. A different ray would have failed to produce the effect. That which is emitted by a September sun, for instance, would strive in vain to waken into life, an April flower. The earth would have gone too far in its orbit for the condition of temperature required by such a flower, to be fulfilled. But God has ordered the mechanism of nature so that no such irregularity ever occurs. The right ray finds the right seed. The revolving

earth brings the spot where it lies, into a position where it will draw from the great centre of heat just the measure of warmth that it needs. And still further, we are told, that in the progress of the seasons there is a peculiar adaptation in the character or quality of the sun's rays, to the wants of the vegetable world. The kind of ray that suits the plant in the spring will not perform the functions that it needs in summer, nor will either of those which suited it in the spring and summer, perform the functions that it needs in the autumn. Accordingly, the ray undergoes a change in precise accommodation to the wants of the plant. At the season of germination, it contains in a predominant degree, what is called the chemical power, just that power which is required to develop and propel the embryo of the seed. When the tender stalk is rearing itself from the ground, and needs nutriment to help it grow, the solar ray is distinguished by a predominance of the light-giving power, light being the agent which most directly assists the plant in secreting from the atmosphere the carbon, with which its woody fibre is formed. And when the autumn approaches, and the fruit is to be matured, the chemical and luminous principles diminish, and the heat giving power becomes predominant in the ray, heat being that which is most needed to mature and ripen the product of the plant. And, did not exactly such an order as this exist, in the mechanism (so to call it) of the sun, or were this order disturbed, vegetable life would become abortive!

Now what contrivance is here; and what grandeur of contrivance? And all (for the machinery is complete in the case of each individual) for the growth of the little flower, which you may crush with your foot. The sun, the strong man of the skies, is thus made the minister of the plant. Its functions have been adjusted to the wants of the minutest herb, and it is its mission as much to nurse the

humble lily with its beams as it is to kindle with them the disc of the mightiest planet. Consider now, another fact, in illustration of God's care of the grass of the field. The proportions of the great earth itself have been determined so as to conform precisely to the conditions which are required in order to the production of the smallest plant that grows upon its surface. Any material change in its bulk would be fatal to the whole vegetable world. It is a familiar fact that the plant derives its sustenance, very much, from the moisture which by some internal force is forced up from the earth, and distributed through every limb and leaf. But the attraction, or what ever else this internal force may be, must naturally be counteracted by the gravity of the earth. If the force of this gravity be unduly great it must prevent the rising and dispersing of the sap through the tubes of the plant. If it be unduly small the sap must rise too rapidly and violently for the purpose of affording healthy support. And in either case, from inanition or repletion the plant must sicken and perish, unless some change should take place in its organization. Now the mass of the earth, and the height and capacity of each plant that grows upon it, are so adjusted to each other, that the precise result always occurs; that the moisture absorbed by the root rises just as far, and is distributed just as widely as there are organs to receive it. The force of gravity is graduated exactly so as to allow the internal power of the plant to perform successfully its functions, of supplying it with nutriment. But let this nice balance be destroyed, as it would be the moment the bulk of the earth, and consequently the force of gravity were increased or diminished, (supposing always the plant to remain unchanged) and the whole process of vegetation must cease. The very same power and wisdom then, which were concerned in weighing and shaping the mighty globe, were concerned in providing for the growth

of the humblest flower. God made the earth for the lily as much as the lily for the earth. The same thing is illustrated by another well known fact. In plants which hang their heads when in bloom, the pistils (upon which the dust which fertilizes the blossom must be deposited) are longer and hence lower, than the stamens which supply this dust. The gravity of the earth is the power which causes the dust to drop to its appointed receptacle. And it is so adjusted that it produces just that effect. Now, says a learned writer on physical science, "an earth, greater or smaller, denser or rarer than the one on which we live would require a change in the structure and strength of the footstalks of all the little flowers that hang their heads under our hedges. And is there not something curious, he adds, in an arrangement by which the great globe, from pole to pole and from circumference to centre, is employed in keeping a snow-drop in the position most suited to the promotion of its vegetable health?" I might go on to speak of the mathematical principles which are applied to the formation of the texture of plants and show with what artistical regularity these fabrics have been elaborated. And I might follow the various changes which the chemical elements furnished by the atmosphere, produce and show how nicely the law of definite proportions is observed in them all. But what I have said is enough to illustrate my point, that the life of a flower is something upon which God has expended an amount of care and contrivance and power, which is fitted to overwhelm us with astonishment. He has made the lily grow, by the same stupendous apparatus by which He lit the fires of the sun, and shaped the mass of the earth, and ordered the rolling of the seasons, and compounded the constituents of the atmosphere, and underlaid the universe with general laws of order, and proportions, and sequence. All this he has done for what we call an insignificant plant; and all this we are

called upon to notice when we are directed to consider the lilies how they grow.

And now I argue that in all this which he has done for the plant, we have a type of what he may be expected to do for creatures of a higher class. I draw from all this the inference, that arrangements more wonderful, and plans of far higher import, may be expected to appear in God's economy, in reference to moral beings. The soul is a plant of immortal nature. A flower of Paradise and with what care may not He who provides for the lily, provide for it? And what strange ministries may not He employ for its preservation and growth? Look at the soul as sin has made it; cleaving to the dust, encrusted in worldliness, passive and dead as to spiritual things. Left to itself it is helpless, it will never germinate into its true life, it will never expand and aspire in the direction of its true destiny. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh. The soul naturally is in bondage to carnal appetites, and encumbered with earthly interests, like the seed imprisoned in the soil. Now, shall God raise the seed from its grave, and give it health and beauty, and yet suffer the soul to lie neglected in its corruption, and perish forever? Will he so clothe the grass of the field and not much more clothe that nobler creature? Will he notice the little grain in the earth, and give it a body as it pleaseth him, and not mark man in his fallen state, and reanimate the spirit, dead in trespasses and sins? There is a ground laid, therefore in the existence of a beneficent vegetable economy, for the expectation that a higher economy, suited to the exigencies of moral beings and adapted to recover them from the ruin, in which sin has involved them, will be devised. And hence we are not surprised to learn from a revelation, that God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner; and that He has provided a way, a system of means, for the salvation of the guilty. The tru-

ly penitent man who has felt sin to be a bondage, and a burden, and a power, that is ever working death in him, and who is sighing for deliverance from it, and panting for the light and life of God's love, may be encouraged, therefore, by the growing lily. The sweet flower will tell him there is hope for him; and will preach to him from its lowly pulpit the gospel of the grace of God.

And something too, of what mysteries that gospel may be expected to contain, it will suggest to him. For, after all what wonderful arrangement of means and distribution of agents and forces which we have seen employed in the vegetation of a plant, we are not surprised to learn from the Revelation, that man's salvation has been wrought out by marvelous processes, and contrivances stupendously great. Men sometimes denounce the doctrines of christianity as unreasonable, because they represent God as doing so much for the salvation of man, because the measures he is said to have adopted are so extraordinary, and so (as they judge) disproportionately vast and costly. The incarnation and the atonement of a Divine Redeemer, the gracious offices of the Holy Spirit, and the existence of a previous purpose in the mind of God contemplating the salvation of the particular soul from eternity, these seem incredible; and incredible because (to the person in question) they seem too grand and elaborate an apparatus for the object proposed. If such thoughts trouble any of you, consider what measures God has adopted for the growing of the grass, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven. See the humble lily, throwing its relations around the sunbeam, and the path of a planet, and the bulk of the earth, and the elements of the atmosphere, and the great laws of proportion and combination which spread their network through creation; and cease to wonder that there are great things brought to light in a plan which aims at the

redemption of a soul. What way God shall take for developing and maturing the life of a plant, we cannot (apart from the fact, forecast or divine, nor what way he shall take to redeem and sanctify a fallen man. That he should exceed our thoughts in his plans is probable. That He has done so in the production of the plant, we can easily see. Why should we be so reluctant to hear, then, from the Bible that He has done so also, in the salvation of man? O, dear friends, the history of the flower rebukes you for your slowness to believe the stupendous truths of christianity! With all its strange revelations before us, what commends itself to us as more likely, than that God should so love the world as to give His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life? Or that the mercy that pardons sin should shine upon us through a mediator, who was God manifest in the flesh? Or that the energy which quickens the passive soul into spiritual life, should be the power of the Holy Ghost? Or that the change which such a soul undergoes in being delivered from sin, should be a new birth? Indefinite wonders we are undoubtedly taught to expect in any economy of grace which God should devise; from the wonders which we find characterizing the economy of nature, and why stagger at those which christianity reveals, any more than at any others?

But to return to the emblem of the text, we may consider the lily not inaptly, as the type of much that belongs to the development of the spiritual principle in the life of the converted man. For what was the grain, lying in the soil, we have at length, the growing plant—a thing whose proper home is the quiet, secluded, cultivated field. There is no affinity between the flower and the battle-plain, ploughed by the war-horse's hoof, or the crowded street, worn hard by the tramp of busy men, or the rocky-reef swept by

the wave and the storm. The flower loves the habitations of peace. It twines its tendrils around your door-posts, nestles under the ledges of your windows, expands within the enclosure of your gardens, or shelters itself in the lonely glen and valley. The flower is not the nurseling of the jostling, struggling, fighting world. It vegetates in the tranquil nooks and corners of ground where the sunshine and the dew, and the hand that tends it, the eye that loves it, are its only visitors. And piety in the soul is not the nurseling of the strifes, and excitements, and cares, and passions, of the world. It must grow as the lily grows, where heaven can look down upon it, and it can look up to heaven. It wants its hedge of domestic sanctities, and its consecrated closet, and its quiet solitude, in which to meditate, and its cloisters in the breast where holy thoughts and spiritual affections, may shelter their purity from outward pollution. Show me a languid, sickly Christian, and I shall explain the secret of his unhappy condition, probably by saying, "he is growing where he ought not to be." He has become entangled with the affairs of this life; and the dust of worldliness is blighting his spiritual frame, and earthly schemes and cares have separated him from fellowship with God, and his Son. He has left that fenced garden, that spot "out of the world" where the Saviour placed him, and where the "beloved" (as the Song of Solomon expresses Christ's affectionate intercourse with his saints), "goes down to wander amidst the beds of spices, and to gather lilies." Yet, let it not be supposed, that man is to cease to be man, and sever his heart from all human sympathies and interests, by becoming a Christian. Though there is nothing more distinctly affirmed in the Gospel than "that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," yet in a certain sense, the controlling sentiment of the Saviour in coming from heaven, was his love for the world;

and as he loved men, and sympathized with them, and shared in their interests, and honored the relationships that bound them together—in a word, made himself one with them, so must we do. And this kindly identity with our race, is one of the conditions of spiritual health. Our hearts need to be knit with others, in the ties that God has ordained, and made the web that holds society together, in order that grace may thoroughly pervade and sanctify them. The religion that makes man a stone, rootless and flowerless, lying upon the surface of the earth like rubbish, rather than blending with its mould as a vital part of its organism, is not the religion of the gospel. That takes the lily, the growing plant as its type, with its radicle penetrating the soil beneath, while its vigorous plume lifts itself heavenward above. God made the family and the many relationships to which it gives birth. God made the love of our neighbor to stand parallel with our love to ourselves. God gave the heart as many fibres, with which to clasp its loved ones, as he gives to the starting germ with which to fasten itself to the soil. And piety will suffer, just as nature is mutilated, by wresting it from these laws and ordinances of its Creator. The hermit and misanthrope, the monk and the nun, are not the true products of the Gospel; and never have given, and never will give to the world, the kind of holiness which Christ came to introduce amongst men. He took upon himself the nature of Abraham, we read, and not that of angels, and we are not to throw off nature in becoming his disciples. It is not a petrified, but a sanctified nature, that constitutes piety, a nature that intertwines itself with all the relationships of society, and refines and purifies them all, and so, through them all, draws nutriment to its own spirituality, and exhibits in new forms the manifold grace of God.

And so too, I may add, piety is something which embellishes life. It is a flower upon the earth, and an odor in the atmosphere. Its influence, whenever its functions are in healthy exercise, is pleasant and beneficent. It is absent from the heart, or languishing there whenever, as the Proverb has it, it is not "an ornament of grace to the head," that is, whenever it is not found investing an individual with amenity of manner, and amiability of disposition. It was made to be a blessing to the world; to be a softness and a beauty amidst its asperities and deformities. It was made to gladden the eye of the jaded traveler by the roadside, to adorn the drawing-room and the sick chamber, to wreath roses upon the brow of the child, and to deck with it snowy purity, the breast of the bride. Consider the lily, ye followers of the Saviour, and learn like it and learn like him to be beneficent and attractive, making others better and happier for the seeing of you, and through the love you win to yourselves, persuading them to love the religion which you represent.

But the plant, I observe once more, is to be regarded as a type for the Christian, in the fact, that it does grow. It is not a stationary thing. There is an idea of the Divine Architect, so to speak, involved in the embryo, and the history of the plant after its germination is the development of that idea. The vegetable world is in perpetual progress, tending always to its destined end; and elaborating always its appointed results. It is a growing world, fulfilling important offices in the present, and providing for others which are to be needed in the future. No plant lives and dies naturally without accomplishing something. It embellishes one season, and it leaves behind it the means of embellishing another. It manifests a benevolence, if I may call it so, which serves the generation of which it is a part, and then projects itself on to the following one. It throws itself

thus into the universal current of vegetable life; and helps to keep it flowing on, through the track of foreseen ages. In the graphic lines of the poet—

“The pulpy acorn, e'er it swells, contains
 The oak's vast branches in its milky veins;
 Each ravelled bud, fine film, and fibre-line,
 Traced with nice pencil on the small design.
 The young Narcissus, in its bulb compressed,
 Cradles a second nestling on its breast,
 In whose fine arms a younger embryo lies,
 Folds its thin leaves, and shuts its floret-eyes;
 Grain within grain, successive harvests dwell,
 And boundless forests slumbers in a shell.”

And so, the Christian is taught that his life ought to be a growth, a development, and execution of the purposes entertained by his Creator in giving him being, and especially, in making him the subject of his quickening grace. His piety ought to be prolific. In his soul, upon its tablets, there was mapped a plan, coincident with the germination of his spiritual life, which God intended him to fulfill, in what he should thereafter be and do; a plan which contemplated many results for himself, and for others contemporary with him, and for generations to come after him. And piety is the fulfilling of this plan. The kingdom of God is a growing kingdom, a prolific power in the heart and in the world. It is like the grain of mustard seed, small perhaps in the beginning, but spreading and rising until it becomes the greatest of all herbs. Its effect in the individual, as the Psalmist describes it, is to make him “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brought forth its fruit in its season, and whose leaf never withers,” and its effect upon the race of mankind, when its consummation shall have been attained, as Isaiah foretells it, will be to “make the wilderness and the solitary place glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

Now, Christian, consider the lily here; and ask yourself if you are growing, so as to fulfill the purposes of your Master, in giving you a place in his kingdom. He wants no stationary member there. He wants no one to live and die there, leaving the world no better than if he had never been in it. You have something to do; something which the present and the future are both expecting at your hands. And if you have the true spiritual life in your soul, you will not be willing to go out of the world without leaving an impression upon it somewhere which shall go to swell the influences that are to effect the world's regeneration.

With one thought more, I will conclude. Consider the growing plant. It is growing, because, it was good ground into which the seed, from which it sprung, had fallen. Some seed, shaken from the parent stalk at the same time, fell upon the hard wayside, and the fowls have devoured it up. Some fell upon stony ground, and the scorching sun has withered its feeble blade. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns have sprung up and choked it. And from these seeds, there are no graceful blossoms, no promising harvests, blessing the world to-day. My friends, the seed of spiritual and eternal life, is the word of God—the Gospel which we preach in Christ's name unto you. And its legitimate effect is to lead men to repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of heart and conduct. If it has not produced this effect upon you, it is because there has been in you no good ground upon which to receive it. Your souls have been kept in unbelief, by the artifices of the Devil, or the fear of some temporal loss or reproach, or by the cares or pleasures of the world. And yet this seed of the word must have its effect, or you can have no hope, none which God sanctions, of salvation. How long do you intend to continue unfruitful hearers of the

word? Are your minds made up never to believe and obey the Gospel? Alas, then I can tell you what is to be the result. These spring flowers will soon be blooming over your graves. And sweet witnesses of the love of God, as they are, in their blindness, they will still be whispering of his love above the spot where your bodies are reposing. But there will be nothing to speak to your lost souls, of that love. There will be no tokens of mercy to meet you in that cheerless world where your spirits will have gone, and the only voice that can come to you there, will be that wail of hopeless sorrow in which your own tongues will have to take part, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."



THE SEAT OF SIN.

OCTOBER 25, 1868.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”—PSALM 51:10.

DAVID, at the time he composed this prayer, was absorbed with the contemplation of that particular sin, or course of sin, to which you will find a reference made in the title of the Psalm. While under the influence of the unwholesome passion by which he had been decoyed into this sin, or course of sin, he had been like a man intoxicated, or in a delirium. With an infatuation which made him a totally different being from his proper self, he rushed persistently down the declivity of transgression, till in the end, he found himself in a perfect slough of crime and infamy. Then the bandage dropped from his eyes, the paralysis left his soul. He awoke, as it were, to a sudden discovery of what he had done, and what he had become. We will not stop to explain the phenomenon of his apostasy. It is confessedly a mysterious one. It belongs, however, to a class of phenomena, frequent enough in their occurrence to be familiar to us all. You may see persons, almost any day, deploring some act or procedure in which they have been engaged, wondering that they could have been foolish and wicked enough to engage in it, and protesting that could they get back again to the point where they stood before consenting to engage in it, nothing could

induce them to engage in it. They have all been thrown by some irregular action of the mind into a state of temporary intoxication or delirium. David's case was an extreme one of this class; but extreme cases do now and then occur, in all the departments of mental life.

But what I propose that we shall look at is the form and direction which David's desire for a recovery from his fall took. He had committed a complicated and aggravated sin against God and man. It left him with remorse in his heart, with a stain upon his character, with guilt on his soul, and with the torture of apprehended retribution in his conscience. He was not content, as he might have been, to remain with desperate self-abandonment, in such a condition. From this abyss into which he had sunk, he evidently sought to escape. He would regain, as far as such a thing was practicable, the ground he had lost. The direct and obvious way to do this would be to get himself back again, as nearly as possible, into the relations with God and man, in which he had been placed before; to have his account with the injured parties set right; to do what was requisite in order to the canceling of his sin; and the avoiding of the consequences of it; in other words, to obtain forgiveness for it from God, and to make reparation for the wrong involved in it, to man. An evil deed once done is, of course, done forever. It is fixed in the unalterable, inaccessible past, and can never, as an actual fact, be undone. As an effectual fact, though, that is, as a fact, viewed in its bearing and operation, it may, to a greater or less extent, be undone. If you have inflicted a wrong upon a neighbor, you may, in the first place, by a compliance with certain conditions, receive a full and hearty pardon from him, which will put you right in respect to his feeling toward you. You may, in the second place, make amends to him for any damage he may have sustain-

ed through your ill conduct, which will put you right in respect to his outward estate. And then, you may, in the third place, by an entire and permanent reformation in your deportment, regain your character, which will put you right in respect to the community at large. And by these means you may be said to have retraced your way, almost, if not quite, to the spot from which you had diverged. Generally it is in this way that men seek to effect a return from those aberrations by which they have declined from rectitude; and when they have successfully pursued it, and have achieved the result it aims at, they are satisfied. They consider themselves virtually reinstated in the position they had originally occupied. David might have adopted this way in proposing to himself an escape from his condition of apostacy. And indeed he did adopt it, for these steps belong, fundamentally, to any process by which a transgressor undertakes to restore himself from a state of sin to one of rectitude. That he sought pardon from God for his grievous offences we know from various declarations in this Psalm. That he made what reparation lay in his power to parties affected by his wrong doing; and that he, during his subsequent life, put a check upon his appetites and maintained a purity of character, we know, or may accept as an indubitable inference from his history. But, you will observe, he does not stop with these steps. He is not satisfied with a result which usually satisfies men in their digressions from rectitude. In getting out of his condition of guilt and infamy, he feels that something more is needed, than putting himself right towards the parties upon whom he had inflicted wrong. He wants to be put right in himself. He argues that the act of sin, committed by a man, demonstrates the existence of something more than the fact created by the commission of that act; that it demonstrates a prior, inherent depravity in the man himself

—an unclean heart and a corrupt spirit—by which he has been prompted to commit that act. He finds, after looking at such an act, that if it were possible to undo it, absolutely and literally, so that every trace of its existence should be obliterated, and the man who committed it should appear as blameless as though he had never committed it, still there would be the evil element, the sinister principle in him, which had been revealed by the commission of it, to be noticed and reckoned with. “Though I comfort myself with the thought,” he may be supposed to have reflected, “that my sin is no longer, in any way, charged to my account, that God and man look upon me as though I had never committed it, still there is the fact—that I could and did commit it—remaining to be estimated, and dealt with. How could I have committed it? Why did I commit it? The only explanation of such a fact is, that I have in me an unclean heart and corrupt spirit; and though my sin has ceased to exist as a fact to be laid to my charge, the unclean heart and corrupt spirit survive, and make me in nature and disposition, a sinner still.” And therefore, we find David’s desire for recovery from his fallen estate, taking the form and direction it does in the text, and going the length it does, when it expresses itself in the prayer, “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

The idea which thus underlies the prayer of David is an important one, and one, which it is to be feared, is too generally overlooked. Our conception of sin, as a quality in ourselves or others, is very apt to be identical, and therefore coextensive only with, our perception of sin as a fact in ourselves or others. Our judgments of men, are determined by our view, and our estimate of, their acts. And if by any process we can expunge these acts from their record—if we can cover them over with apologies—or

neutralize their weight by balancing against them certain good acts, we are ready to conclude that they can be, only in a mitigated or partial degree, reckoned sinners. "I have never injured any one," "I have led an honest and virtuous life," "my conscience is at rest, and I am not afraid to meet God," is language which the minister of religion not unfrequently hears from the lips of the dying man. And yet, I do not know that the dying man was ever yet seen, who would not confess that in some things he had done wrong. When reminded that in appearing before God it will be incumbent on him to satisfy Him that he is free from sin, to make good his claim to rectitude before his bar, to maintain his ease at the tribunal of a judge, who knows everything, who forgets nothing, and who, from the knowledge of the heart, couples always the act with the disposition and motive from which it sprung, the dying man is rarely, perhaps never, found, who is hardened enough or blind enough to adhere to his plea of innocence. Though he may have persuaded himself, while looking at the rules and methods of adjudication current in the world, that the plea is valid, you have only to get him to apprehend, intelligently, that it has now to be tried by such rules and methods as pertain to the adjudications of God, to make him see that it will not stand. He may say to the human inquisitor, "you cannot find a flaw in my life," because he is thinking, when he says this, of the low stand-point from which the human inquisitor must inspect him, and the low standard by which he must estimate him; but when he thinks of God, the Divine inquisitor, inspecting him from his stand-point and estimating him by his standard, he will say no more, "you cannot find a flaw in my life." He will say rather with the Psalmist, "in thy sight shall no man living be justified." He will know that there are obliquities and deficiencies in his life, such as God in the

application of his law to it, must notice and condemn, as sins. And if he continues to say, "I am not afraid to meet God," it will not be in connection with such assertions as "I have injured nobody, I have led an honest and a virtuous life, my conscience is at rest," but in virtue of a trust he has reposed, rightly or wrongly, in something which assures him that God can and will be gracious to sinners. Sin, as a fact, beyond all dispute, lies at every man's door; is charged against every man in that account which he has to settle with God. In some of its various forms, it insinuates itself into, and it vitiates the acts of every man.

But now, the question which David seems to have asked arises, why is it that this sin appears in the acts of every man? How can this universal consent to the commission of sin be accounted for? The answer to this question will lead us to the same conclusion which David reached—the heart in man is an unclean heart; the spirit in man is a disordered and corrupt spirit. The moment that you have proved that every man is chargeable with the commission of sin as a crime, you have proved that every man is chargeable with the entertaining of sin, as a vice. You have shown that there is in him, a disposition, which when it has vent and expression, produces the fact of sin. You may look upon the devastation caused by the eruption of a volcano, upon the dismantled dwellings, and scorched fields, and half-buried villages, and say, "here is a stupendous catastrophe—an appalling prodigy of evil-doing;" but you would say also, "yonder in the bosom of that mountain, lies the energy, the agent, which has wrought the mischief." And though you should see the effect of the eruption in time removed, and the scene resuming its former look of comfort and security, you would never cease to remember, and remember with a shudder

too, that in the bosom of yonder mountain, though sleeping now, and giving no sign of its existence, there lies the energy, the agent, which is capable of bursting out again at any moment in another explosion, and repeating the terrible drama of ruin. So, I say, the sinful act, which you behold in the life of man, is the demonstration of the presence of the baleful fire of sin in the breast of man; and though, you could undo the sinful act, and put things back again, so to speak, in the state in which they were before the sinful act was committed, you would still have to remember, that the baleful fire of sin, was living in the breast of the person who had committed it. You would have to take account of this latter fact, and give it its value and weight, in forming your judgment of that person, though you had found some method by which you could legitimately ignore the existence of the other fact of the commission by him of the sinful act, and cancel it, as an element in his account. The volcanic force would be in him, and you must give him credit for it, and estimate him at what its significance imports, though no token of its fatal working in the past be visible, and no menace of forthcoming convulsion can be detected in its present quietude. Our conception of sin, therefore, is not complete unless from a contemplation of our actual transgressions, we have drawn the inference and recognized the fact, that we are in ourselves sinful beings—that we have in our nature, a disposition which makes us capable of sinning. Our idea of a sinner must represent him, not merely as one who perpetrates acts of sin, but as one, who in his heart and spirit, harbors the inclination and the propensity to perpetrate acts of sin. You have told but half the truth, when you have said of this or that criminal thing, “I have done wrong in doing it.” You must go farther,

and say, "I am myself wrong, I am in my very species and temper wrong, or I could not have consented to do it."

This idea I have said is an important one. It is important, because it transfers the seat of sin from the facts outside of a man to the soul—the essential element within him. It assigns to it, a place, not merely in his history, but in his character. It makes it not merely, attach to his conduct, but inhere in his constitution. It requires us to make the induction, and admit the conclusion, that in the sinner, subjectively, apart from his acts of wrongdoing, and even prior to them, there exists a wrongful bias, or aptitude, which makes him, personally a wrong thing, irrespective of the wrong things he may do, or may have done, just as we make the induction and admit the conclusion that the tree which has been found to bring forth evil fruit, is in itself an evil tree. As the object in all the universe which man is most concerned in understanding (next to God), is man himself, and as the first and most vital need of man, is to be sound and right, in his own nature, nothing can be more important to him, than the knowledge of such a fact as this, for it is a fact, which perhaps more directly than all others, determines his grade and value in the judgment of God. Clearly, the heart, the spirit, is the index which an infallible intelligence would look at before all others, in the attempt to ascertain the exact standing and worth of a man. What he actually is, is the fundamental point in such a problem; and what he does, is a subordinate point, interesting, merely by reason of the light which it throws upon the former one. Everything in the world is ranked and disposed of, ultimately, by an estimate of what it actually is. When you know this, you know where to place it, how to think of it, what treatment to apply to it. And so, man, must ultimately, be ranked and disposed of. If the heart in him be an unclean heart,

and the spirit in him be a false and depraved spirit, he must inevitably be pronounced an unclean, a false, and a depraved being. Now, accepting this as a true representation of man's moral state, admitting that he is, in his heart and spirit, thus morally distempered, so that he is indisposed often to do what he knows to be right, and disposed to do often what he knows to be wrong, we may notice two or three other things, in connection with sin, which are deducible from this fact.

First, it ought not to surprise us that men are, to a large extent, blind to their real condition and character as sinners. If an organ is unsound, you do not wonder that it does not perform the functions of a healthy one. You do not wonder, that the perceptions which are gotten through it, are more or less false. Have you never observed how frequently, sick persons are deceived as to the course their diseases are taking? Have you never heard them say, day by day, "I am better," when you can see that day by day they are dying? Is it not a fact that a physician rarely undertakes to prescribe for himself, because he knows that he is incompetent to form a correct judgment of his own case? And is it not originally probable, therefore, that the man affected with uncleanness of heart and corruptness of spirit, would be liable to err in his conception of his character and condition? It is only, in fact, a different way of stating the same thing, to say of a man, that he is unclean in his heart and corrupt in his spirit, and to say of him, that he takes false views of himself, that he misinterprets his symptoms, that he gives credit to illusions, and misconstrues real things? For it is just by such irregular action of the heart and spirit, that the inherent unsoundness of the heart and spirit would naturally be indicated. "If the light that is in thee be darkness," says our Saviour, "how great is that darkness." The internal

light extinguished, the lantern of the soul fulfilling its office of revealing and apprehending the truth no longer, what can there be in the man but darkness, ignorance, misconception and error? Men notoriously do not like this doctrine, that they are in heart and spirit sinful beings; and generally protest against it, when the charge it contains is directed against them personally; or at least listen to it with an apathy which shows that it is making no intelligent impressions upon their minds. They call the theology which teaches it, a harsh and odious one, a caricature and a libel. Pert writers tax their imagination to prove in the philosophic essay, or illustrate in fiction and drama, that human nature is yet in its normal state, working right where accident does not disturb it; and leaning "e'en in its failings to virtue's side." The goodness of the heart, is constantly set up, as a counter-poise to whatever of badness may appear in a man's act; and the vague assertion, "his spirit was a pure one, he meant no evil," is a mantle broad enough to cover all the wrongdoing of his lifetime. Such utterances may be made with perfect honesty, by those who use them (although this seems hardly credible), and yet prove nothing more than an incapacity in these persons' minds to entertain the idea that the heart is unclean and the spirit depraved—which may be, after all, a corroboration of the main fact affirmed, since upon the assumption that the main fact is, as is affirmed, such an incapacity to see it, would be one of the results which would be expected to follow. It is the patient disabled by the disturbance of his faculties consequent on his morbid state, from giving a diagnosis of his case. The general outcry, with which the promulgation of this idea is met, and the hard terms which are frequently resorted to, to denounce it, ought not, therefore, to surprise us. The Scriptures, with a wonderful consistency in their theory, have repre-

sented just this incapacity to see the distempered condition of his heart and spirit—as a feature in the sinner's case, concurring with that distempered condition. While they affirm that the heart and spirit within him are unclean and depraved, they affirm also, that the reasonings and judgments carried on by means of them may be and often are diametrically at variance with the truth. “A deceived heart has turned him aside,” is the remarkable language in which, in one place, they make this affirmation; “woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter,” is the way in which they make it in another; and “thou sayest I am rich and increased with good, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked,” is the way in which they make it in another.

But a second remark may now be made, which is, that we have in this doctrine, a perfectly adequate occasion for that exercise of Divine power, which, according to the Scriptures, is needed in order to effect a recovery of man from his condition as a sinner. The individual, who like David, has been led to see that the act of sin, being outside of him, in his conduct—is the product of an unclean heart and a corrupt spirit within him, will see that the process by which his condition is to be made right, will be something more than an undoing of the act of sin. It will have to reach and operate upon himself; it will have to accomplish the result of creating in him a clean heart and renewing within him a right spirit. The Scripture theory is consistent with itself again, in this particular. It proposes a remedy exactly suited to the view it gives of the malady to be healed. If the case of the sinner be as it represents it, then the doctrine which it announces, of a supervening of a Divine power upon his heart and spirit, in order to the cleansing and renewing of them, is entitled to

credit by reason of its corresponding, first, with the known exigencies of his case, second, with the precise direction which the mercy of God must take upon the supposition that that mercy should undertake to restore him from his fallen estate. Let us not be surprised then, when we are told that religion, in the Bible view of it, comprehends within it, and is based upon a change in the subject of it, which is called, "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." What less than this would serve the purpose, if sin be a fault which attaches to the nature of man, as well as to his acts, and if the remedy for it is the putting a clean heart and a right spirit within him? This is evidently a work which calls for an exercise of Divine power. A man may possibly, in a certain sense, undo an act. It is impossible for him to unmake or remake himself. When it comes to the work of creating a clean heart and renewing, or new-making, a right spirit within him, he must look up to the gracious energy of God as David did, and cry, "create thou a clean heart in me, O God, and renew thou, a right spirit within me." Men who can see no fault in human nature, who have no conception of sin as an infection of the soul, as a thing which utterly forbids the idea of a goodness of heart and a purity of spirit in the being of whom it is predicated, cannot be expected to see any reason for, or probability in, this doctrine of a new birth and a vital change in the recovered sinner. And hence, the religions which are fabricated by man, know nothing of such a doctrine, and preach only their Gospels of Love, or Honesty, or Self-development and Self-purification. The Religion of God contained in the Bible, substantiates its right to be considered such, by the profounder conception which it requires us to take of sin, and by the revelations of a process by which a clean heart is created and a right spirit renewed within the sinner.

A third remark which suggests itself is, that repentance is a state of mind which includes in it a sense of personal unworthiness in the transgressor, as well as a sense of blame-worthiness on account of his acts of wrongdoing. Though, it may begin with a discovery of this blame-worthiness, as was the case with David, who in his anger at his own sin, as portrayed to him in the prophet's parable, exclaimed, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die," it must not stop with it. It must pass from the contemplation of the unclean act, to the unclean heart which generated the act; from the wrong deed to the wrong spirit, which prompted and consented to the deed. It must make the man stand ashamed and saddened and appalled at what he is in himself, as well as what he has done. It will measure the breach between him and God which it confesses, more by the contrariety which lies between himself personally and God, than by that which appears between his acts and God. These acts, in themselves perhaps, may not excite any great emotion. They may not be of the class of flagrant sins which shock the conscience and draw upon the perpetrator the remonstrances and execration of his fellow-men. But when looked at as indications of nature opposed to God, as expressions of a love of sin predominating in the soul, as the outflowing of a fountain of wickedness, which lies within him, which fountain is his own heart and spirit—they will furnish an adequate ground and motive for shame and sorrow, and alarm. In this view of them, no man can fail to find cause enough for repentance, in his sins; and without this view, his repentance will not be a genuine exercise, belonging, as all true repentance does, to the gracious work of God, by which the unclean heart is cleansed, and the corrupt spirit renewed. For till the heart and the spirit are brought to God for cleansing and renewing, the remedy

for sin proposed through his gracious work is not applied for; and while the remedy is not applied for, the malady, it undertakes to relieve, sin itself, is not really apprehended and felt. You never can truly repent of your sins till you repent of yourself, as a sinner; till your sense of the uncleanness of your heart and the depravity of your spirit, constrain you to appeal to the mercy of God for the removing of the vileness within you. And this may be the reason why the exercises of repentance, through which some of you have passed, have not been attended by that radical and vital change which the Gospel promises in the case of the penitent. You have repented of the acts of injustice, or unkindness, or deception, or licentiousness you have committed; that is, you have been sorry for them; you have felt humbled on account of them, and you have been troubled at the prospect of the punishment they have exposed you to, but you have not repented of the heart and the spirit which led you to commit those acts. You have been sick of your sins, as hateful and pernicious things, and wished they could be undone, and sought, perhaps, as well as you could, to undo them; but you have never been sick of yourself—as the hateful and pernicious author of those sins; and so you have not gone to the remedy of the Gospel—for that is for you, not your sins; and so you have not experienced the healing promised to the penitent. The prayer you must use before you can experience this, is the one before us, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

One brief remark more is this: The Christian, the man, who has experienced this healing process, will prove the fact by the assiduity and carefulness with which he maintains the cleanness of his heart and the purity of his spirit. Acts, outward works of decorum and duty, devotional rites, and rules of religious order, will not be neglected, but,

brethren, if the great change which makes the Christian, has been wrought in you, it began in the heart and the spirit, and it will attest its presence and reality, by a progressive work there. Remember you were called and chosen, grafted into Christ, and sealed by his Spirit, not merely that your sins might be pardoned, and your souls ultimately translated to heaven, but that you might be holy, that you might be distinguished in the world as "partakers of the Divine nature," men "known and read of all" as men with clean hearts and right spirits. Your badge, your work, the proof of your conversion, and your security for final salvation, are to be found in your identifying this prayer with your life: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!"



THE PENITENT, ILLUSTRATED.

DECEMBER 10, 1855.

“I will arise and go to my Father and will say unto him, ‘Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants.’”—LUKE 15:18.19.

THE charge which the speaker here brings against himself, and the judgment which he passes upon his conduct, do not surprise us. He is right in all that he thinks, and in all that he says of himself. Just such penitential reflections and resolutions became him in the position in which he had placed himself. Between that position and his father’s presence and favor there was a great chasm interposed, which required, for the crossing of it, just such a bridge as was constituted by his present state of mind. Just such a bridge is required in order to the establishment of friendly relations between the parties in every case, where sin has interposed its chasm between man and God. Until he repents the sinner retains a posture of deliberate and flagrant opposition to God; and God can regard him and deal with him, only in the character of a sinner. The unholy disposition, or wicked practice, which he will not repent of, he still cherishes and clings to; and if such unholy disposition or wicked practice created, at the inception of it, a breach between him and God, it will perpetuate that breach just as long as it is cherished and clung to. Hence in any overture which God might be

pleased to make towards the establishment of friendly relations between himself and a sinner, it is to be expected that the exhibition of a penitential spirit on the part of the latter, would be one of the first and most positive conditions. In any Gospel, emanating from God, and proposing terms of reconciliation to guilty men, it is to be expected that an injunction to repent would be included as a primary stipulation. Accordingly in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do find this injunction, in one form or another, stated upon almost every page. Side by side with the fact of sin in man, it lays the obligation to repent. Argument, precedent, precept and illustration, are all employed to enforce it, and to explain the manner of executing it. As the physician, in attempting to restore his patient to health, prescribes with all the precision of which he is master, the means to be used, and the way in which they are to be used, so Christ and his Apostles have left, as it were, no expedient untried, to impress upon the sinner the necessity of repentance, and to enlighten him as to the nature of it. Beyond a doubt this was one of the designs of our Lord in delivering the parable from which our text is taken. The Prodigal, with these words upon his lips, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants," is meant to stand before the world as a type of what every wandering child of God must become, before he can be restored to the presence and favor of his Father in heaven. Wandering children of God, we have only too much reason to believe, are present here, this morning, in this congregation; men and women who, in the manner of their lives, are separating the gifts and bounties of God from God himself, nay, who are substituting these gifts and bounties for God, and it may be, in some cases, violently using them for purposes which he has

prohibited, and which he regards as personally offensive to himself. The liberal prodigal—the profligate child of a human parent—the youth found at any stage of a course of folly and vice, like that which the subject of the Saviour's story had entered upon, we should feel like pitying. We should feel like going to him and saying, “You are rushing into destruction. This riotous living will bring you inevitably to shame and misery. Be honest with yourself, and confess the truth. Look where you are going; and be persuaded, while the opportunity is left to you, to retrace your steps, and go home to your Father's house.” And with our entreaties, we should couple such counsels and directions as we might be able to give, as to the steps to be taken, and the temper and demeanor to be assumed, in starting upon this return. Oh, could we but see it, there is infinitely greater cause for the entertainment of pity towards these spiritual truants, these wandering children of God, than there would be, in the case of such a literal prodigal! There is no form of profligacy so desperate as that of squandering life in the service of sin; no adventure so reckless as that of trying to make ourselves independent of God; no delusion so wild and so fatal as that of fancying that a state of separation from God can prove a better state than one of harmony and friendship with him!

This Jesus saw; and in a pity, as wise as it was profound, he made it his business, while he was on earth, and he has employed his Word, his Providence and his Spirit, ever since his ascension to heaven, to seek out the sinner everywhere, and to conjure and command him to repent. He has taken pains, to make the manner of performing this duty as plain as the obligation to perform it. To formal and didactic expositions on the point, he has added a practical example, an illustrative specimen of the process of repenting, in the parable before us. He has opened to us in

the Prodigal, a human heart, acted upon and exercised in the process; and he has given us, in his utterances, the formulas by which a heart so acted upon and exercised, must express itself; so that not a vestige of uncertainty may remain in the sinner's mind, as to what he is required to do, when he is called upon to repent. I propose to set before you, in further remarks, some of those intimations which the text throws out, as to the nature of true evangelical repentance.

And first, I would call your attention to the import of the phrase, "I have sinned." It is an expression which may signify little or much, according to the spirit in which it is uttered. We must, here, give it all the force and extent which honesty and intelligence in the speaker could throw into it. It is an explicit, positive, categorical, affirmation. There are no restrictions, no qualifications, no reservations in it. It means what it professes to say distinctly and fully. It differs altogether from those weak and frivolous confessions, which are often heard, which while they use the words, "I have sinned," have so many excuses and palliations for sin, covered up in the sense, that they amount really to a declaration of the penitent's innocence rather than of his guilt. Nothing was farther from the Prodigal's thoughts than to take advantage of any of those devices for neutralizing or cancelling the wrongdoing, which conscience shows in its account against them, which self-deceived or presumptuous men adopt. He does not say "I have sinned, but I meant no harm by it." "I have sinned, but no worse than my neighbor." "I have sinned, but I was forced to do so in order to maintain my respectability or escape detriment to my worldly interests." "I have sinned, but I have, at the same time, been doing so much good, that my merits more than balance my transgressions." You discover no trace of this undercurrent of

this exculpatory reasoning in his heart. You detect no whisper aside, by which the mind unsays what the lips say. "I have sinned" with him is a plain, unequivocal unadulterated proposition. It is the testimony of an honest witness, meaning to convey exactly the impression which his words legitimately convey; and meaning therefore, to take upon himself simply and absolutely, without prevarication or apology, the character of a sinner. And in the same open and unambiguous way every genuine penitent will utter his confession, "I have sinned." He will not attempt secretly, to prove that he is no criminal, while he is formally affirming that he is one. He is too ingenuous to make use of that trickery, by which the soul seeks to evade a confession of its guilty character to itself. He has no disposition to resort to those adroit rejoinders to the accusation of conscience, by which the sense of sin may be parried, or countervailed; rejoinders, I may remark, by which thousands of persons falsify their so-called repentance, and keep themselves implicated in a state of sin, like the fluttering bird entangling itself more and more in the toils of the net. "I have sinned," as he uses the phrase, will utter honestly and categorically what he believes and what he feels.

And, then, further, it will indicate, as it did in the case of the Prodigal, that beyond the conviction of the mere fact of his sinfulness, his mind is affected with a clear and intelligent impression of the evil nature of sin. No one can doubt that the Prodigal was profoundly in earnest when he uttered that phrase. He not only meant what he said, but he meant much by what he said. His language is unquestionably the language of strong emotion. And strong emotion is the result of some clear conception, some vivid conviction in the mind. You do not cry, "I am lost," when you do not think you are in danger; or when

you do but dimly apprehend the danger to which you are exposed. It is the sight of the danger, and the persuasion of the magnitude of the danger, which must rouse within you the emotion of which the cry, "I am lost," is the expression. This other cry, "I have sinned," uttered in the tone and temper which the Prodigal employs, must be interpreted as the expression of an emotion, excited in his mind by a powerful manifestation to him, of the guiltiness, and hurtfulness of sin. The same view must lie at the basis of repentance in every case. The party must see something in the fact which he confesses when he says "I have sinned" which awakens within him the emotions of sorrow and shame and alarm. He must have some clear apprehension, some affecting recognition of the criminal and ruinous nature of sin. To some extent, he must have sounded its depth, measured its proportions, analyzed its elements, determined its properties, and traced out its tendencies. If men fail frequently to realize the character of the true penitent, as I have just said, for want of honesty in confessing the fact of their sinfulness, they fail to do so with still more frequency, it is probable, for want of a definite and adequate knowledge of what the fact of their sinfulness amounts to. They have not deliberated upon its import. They have not informed themselves, they have not reflected, so as to have an intelligent idea of its meaning and scope. Is it a grave matter, calling for grave thought, grave feeling, grave treatment? Or is it an inconsiderable trifle, a subject which one may rationally decline to trouble himself about, or the existence of which he may ignore altogether with safety? In regard to the majority of men, if we may judge from their conduct, we are bound to conclude that if they have raised the question at all, they have responded to it in the latter way. They have pronounced sin to be so insignificant, or so venial an affair,

that they may plead guilty to it in the past, without remorse, and continue the practice of it in the future, without compunction or hesitation. You may hear them say, "I have sinned," perhaps, when going through the forms of public worship, or when forced into the expression of an opinion by your interrogatories in a private interview; but the confession will fall from their lips as heartlessly and as mechanically, as if they were assenting to your remark about the weather or replying to your question about the health of their families. In vain you look for a sign of an emotion akin to that which lay at the bottom of the Prodigal's declaration. In vain you look for a symptom of pained or alarmed sensibility, to show that with the words they are repeating, the idea of sin, as the word of God represents it—the idea of sin as a crime, as a thing abominable in the eyes of God, and laying the perpetrator of it, under the ban and curse of his throne—has at all presented itself to their minds. Everything in their manner proclaims that their conceptions of sin are so vague and dark, that they are incapable of communicating to their hearts, a sense either of its hatefulness or its harmfulness. And hence they do not repent, for they do not understand the reasons, they do not entertain the motives, which lead to repentance. The penitent must have been endowed with that which they do not possess, that is, an insight into the true nature of sin. He must have had his eyes opened to that to which they are blind. He must have made the discovery, that in confessing himself to be a sinner he is acknowledging a fact of tremendous magnitude in its bearings upon his character and interests; a fact which arrays against him the attributes and government of God, and which brands him with the stain of the greatest crime a creature can commit. The question, what is a proper view of the nature of sin is, therefore, an important

one in connection with this subject of repentance. And the answer to it has not been overlooked by the Saviour in the form he has given to this parable.

This will appear if we look now at the phrases which follow after and which precede the Prodigal's confession, "I have sinned." First, take that which follows after it, "I have sinned, against heaven and before thee." He exposes here the central element, the essence of the idea of sin, which his mind was entertaining. The wrong done to his parent, the disowning of the sacred ties which bound him to him, the violation of the obligations he was under to him, the cruel and complicated wound he had inflicted upon his heart—this it was that stood out before him as the chief feature in the spectacle of malignity which he recognized in his conduct. Could the emotion which was agitating his breast have been analyzed, it would have been found to contain, unquestionably, a large proportion of sorrow for the disgrace and misery he had brought upon himself. And possibly along with this, there would have been a considerable intermixture of that pain of exasperation which follows upon the discovery that one has been betrayed by those in whom he had confided; and farther still, there might have been something of that soreness—that tormenting disquietude which attends the conviction that one has played the fool, and brought upon himself the contempt and reprobation of the community around him. But, uppermost among all the feelings which were struggling in his heart, and, asserting itself with such commanding precedence of tone, that all others were for the moment thrown into the back-ground, was this of remorse and grief at the fact that his sin had been the transgression of the law of nature, and religion which required him to love, honor and obey his father. The aspect under which sin must appear to the soul, in repentance towards God, is analogous to this.

Its thought must place God just where the parent stood in the Prodigal's thought. The emotion which expresses itself in the confession, "I have sinned," must revolve around that grand demonstration of grief, contained in the clause, "Against heaven and before thee." Strike where it may upon earthly objects, upon the sinner's self, or his kindred, or society, it is refracted, as it strikes its object, like a ray of light, and takes its direction towards God, as its ultimate mark. It reaches heaven, and reports itself there to God, as an arrow does to the heart which it pierces. This is what David affirms, when in the fifty-first Psalm he says, "against thee, thee only, have I sinned." Not against God only, in one sense, for his sin swept over a large circle of objects in its course; and yet against God only, in that sense in which his mind was now apprehending it; since the various forms of wrongdoing to his fellowmen which had been included in it, were seen by him now, to have passed beyond them, and to have converged their separate shafts into one great volley of wrongdoing, hurled against God. It is this same thought or conviction which gives its tone to the sorrow of the penitent man. It is this which makes it definite and specific—which distinguishes it from a numerous brood of other sorrows to which the sinner is almost invariably subject. You will find him sometimes bewailing his evil practices, when their wasting or corroding effect upon his bodily constitution, in tokens too patent to be denied, begins to show itself. You will see him weep, sometimes, as he reflects upon the anguish he has poured into the hearts of those who have loved him and yearned over him, in all his wanderings, with tender constancy and patient hope. You will hear him sometimes cursing the vices which have enslaved him, when he thinks of the heights of fortune and respectability from which they have dragged him, and the disappointment and woe

into which they have decoyed him. You will mark, sometimes, the quenching of all the inner light of life in his soul, and the gathering of a cloud about his heart, which wraps him in habitual melancholy, and makes his world a scene of disgust—a sick-bed on which the patient tosses restlessly, from morn to night and from night to morn, or a wintry landscape blasted by frost and draped in mist; until in the desolation of his spirit, he sighs, like poor Byron, “the worm, the canker, and the grief, are mine alone.” But in none of these phases of sorrow in sin (in themselves) can you detect the quality of that sorrow for sin, which constitutes repentance. Because in all the bitterness of soul with which the party is now contemplating the fact that he has sinned, the source of the bitterness, does not lie in that other fact that he has “sinned against heaven and before God.” It is not that fact which weighs upon his spirit and occasions his brokenness of heart. It is his view of the damage which sin has wrought in the direction of self, and not the wrong it has been doing to God, which has led him to deplore and condemn it. And the real nature of sin, therefore, he has not discovered. That which gives it its real malignity, its real turpitude and criminality, he has failed to take account of. O, what a waking up of the soul from these low, natural conceptions of sin, there is when it has been brought to see it, in the simple and awful light of a direct warfare upon the rights and the person of God! And what a different estimate is then put upon its character! And how unlike all other sorrows is the sorrow which the conviction of it produces in the heart! “Against heaven and before thee”—that and no other is the connection in which he will get his idea of the nature of sin.

But the full compass of this idea is not embraced until we take into view, the other phrase which the Prodigal

uses, as introductory to his declaration, "I have sinned." That phrase is a single word, but one of the most expressive ones to be found in human language. It is "Father"—the name given to a parent—the author and conservator of our being. "Father, I have sinned, against heaven and before thee." What force is communicated to this last expression, "before thee," when we look back to the person referred to by the "thee," and find him called "Father!" "I have sinned" is the language of conscious guilt; "Before thee," indicates that guilt, in the speaker's view, consists of the direct wronging of a particular party. And, "Father," shows that that party is the last one whom it could be expected, that malevolence or violence could be aimed at—the wrongdoer's parent! By tracing the Prodigal's thought up to this climax, we may see in its broad features, the idea which was present to his mind. By conducting the sinner's mind through a similar order of thought, and up to a similar climax, we shall introduce him to something like a correct impression of his guilt in reference to God. Let him say in good faith and with an informed understanding, "I have sinned"—and then let him consider the sin which he confesses as an offence terminating directly upon God, and say with God in his eye, "against heaven and before thee, I have sinned"—and then, let him conceive of God, in the simple character of a "Father," till the spirit of the child awakes in his heart, and speaks out in complete expression, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," and he will have attained to the conception of sin, and will have begun to feel that emotion in view of sin, which will demonstrate him a true penitent. It is because men invest God with a false character, and put him in a false relation to them—because they think of him as a mere philosophical force, necessary to be assumed in order to account for the existence of other things—or

as a vague metaphysical abstraction—or sort of universal idea of being and perfection—or as the sum and embodiment of the laws of nature—or as an arbitrary monarch, exercising his power with the stern inflexibility of a machine—or as a keen-eyed judge searching out the faults of his creatures, and brandishing over them the merciless lash of retribution, it is because they think of him in these, or other equally illegitimate ways, that their hearts are so slow to admit a right impression of sin, or to entertain right affections towards it. Were they to get that idea of him (which is the only true one) which represents him as a Father—a Father of whom the human father is only a feeble type, a Father divine; and infinite in this office, as in all others which he holds or exercises, it would not be so hard a thing to make them sensible of the guilt of sin, nor so rare a thing to find them repenting on account of it. Were they to get this idea of God, they would see that sin in them is the spectacle of a spirit, having the high lineage of the offspring of God, dishonoring its nativity, denying its parentage, and perverting its being to ends the very opposite of those which its production contemplated. They would see that sin in them, is revolt from the most just and sacred authority that could conceivably be set over them. They would see that it is weakness and ignorance, presumptuously rejecting the aids of the highest power and wisdom—the child tottering on its tiny limbs and not knowing its right hand from its left, thrusting back the supporting arm, and rejecting the kindly counsels of a father, and that Father—such a one as God. They would see that it is ingratitude, persistently exhibited, for the most lavish bounty. They would see that it is insult returned for the most affecting offices of love. They would see that it is a perpetual discrediting of the truthfulness of him, who gave them the idea of truth, of the justness of

him, who gave them their sense of the obligation of Law, of the rectitude of him who gave them conscience, and of the government of him who taught them to inaugurate the magistrate and erect the tribunal. The penitent sees all this in his sin, because he sees that in sinning against God he is sinning against a Father, possessed, in a degree becoming God, of all a father's affections, and attributes, and prerogatives towards him.

And now, having reached this stage in his experience, we may notice a remaining one, represented in the Prodigal's closing declaration, "and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants." This is the judgment to which his apprehension of the fact of his sin, and of the nature of that sin, had brought him. Where he had been originally he could claim to be no more. The thought of the relation and position in which he had stood to his Father, as a child, he could entertain, now, only as an aggravation of his own criminality. The thought of returning into any such relation and position he did not dare to invoke as an agent in brightening and sweetening his anticipation of his future lot. In what he meant to be an extreme expression of his sense of his own demerit he says, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants." This was an appeal to mercy, couched in terms of the lowliest humility. I take this absolute persuasion of his entire forfeiture of right and favor at the hands of his parent, and the necessity of casting himself upon simple mercy, in his return to him, as an illustration of another feature in the repentance which the sinner is required to exercise towards God. What he has discovered himself to be, as indicated in the expression we have already discussed, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," is all he can present to God when he proposes to seek restoration to his

favor. He can bring with him no Pharisaical parade of his own righteousness, he can only come lifting the Publican's cry, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." He can only come bringing with him such a conviction of his personal unworthiness, as seems effectually to shut up the way of his return, and preclude all hope of a reception. But mercy may open the door. Mercy may suffer the disfranchised child to occupy an ignominious corner in the lodgings of the servants. And deserving nothing, the Prodigal came, asking no more than this—the least, as he intended it, that mercy could bestow. And in such humility, in such consciousness of his own guiltiness, in such honest and entire renunciation of all ground in himself, to demand a favorable acceptance from God, the penitent must come back from his wanderings. The assurance that mercy would respond to his appeal, the Prodigal could not possess, till the experiment had been made, and had terminated according to his hopes. The sinner is happier in this respect than he. The Gospel which summons him to this duty of repentance, proclaims to him before hand that mercy is engaged, to be extended to him, upon his due compliance with this duty. The Gospel tells him that mercy has already opened the way for his admission to his Father's house, not through any potency emanating from his repentance, or in consideration of any merit acknowledged in that, but on the ground of the potency and the merit of the sacrifice which the Son of God offered up for the sin of the world.

Out of this fact there grows, necessarily, this further doctrine, that the mercy which the penitent soul will feel impelled to look to, must be sought for, expectantly and believingly, on this ground of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The repentance of the Gospel is never a despairing,

or even a doubting exercise. It must be coupled with faith. "He that repenteth and believeth, shall be saved," is the Divine command and promise on this subject. "He that cometh to the father (and none can come who do not come in the way of repentance) and in the name of Jesus, shall in no wise be cast out." To these wandering children of God, who may be before me, to-day, I may, then, address a closing invitation to return to the Father. The way I have pointed out. The alternative is set before you, to remain in your estrangement from God, or to take this way. I would fain hope, that there are some whose minds are not yet so blinded and stupefied as to be incapable of feeling any solicitude in regard to their standing in the sight of God, or their destiny in that eternity to which they are passing. If there is one single longing in your hearts after peace with God, one single palpitation of fear as to the result involved in your present course of sin, one whisper of assent in your hearts to that view of the necessity of repentance and the manner of it which I have been presenting, I would seize hold of it, as the angel in Sodom seized hold of the hands of Lot and his party, and draw you, by means of it, into the way of life. I would urge you to enter at once. No enterprise in which you are engaged, of a worldly sort, demands such prompt and immediate attention. And I would urge you to make no mistake as to the nature and condition of it. In no other undertaking can a mistake or failure involve you in such fatal damage. Poor Prodigal, be exhorted to arise and go to your Father! Your husks may be exchanged for the fatted calf! God may be secured as your present and eternal friend, and heaven as your heritage and home, if you will only—with your eye resting upon Jesus as the way of access, and the ground of acceptance—lay at the throne of

Divine mercy, a heart breathing this confession, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants!"



INCOMPREHENSIBLE THINGS,

NOVEMBER 22, 1868.

“Jesus answered and said unto him what I do thou knowest *not* now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”—JOHN 13:7.

THESE words of our Lord contain a rebuke called forth by the restiveness or forwardness of Peter in refusing to allow his Master to wash his feet. The conduct of Peter was characteristic, and on this account does not surprise us. Perhaps we may go further and say it was natural, just what we would have expected from any one in the circumstances; and on this account also, it does not surprise us. The wonder is, that all the disciples did not do as Peter did, and recoil with a sort of pious indignation from receiving from the hands of Jesus, a service which seemed so derogatory to his office and character. The mind in us will form judgments of the things which pass before our eyes. According to those rules of justice and propriety which we recognize as pertinent to the case, we will frame a decision, and very generally utter it, in regard to the right or the wrong of any thing we see our fellow men doing. Peter did this in the case before him; and with his usual impetuosity of temper, let his Lord know that the decision his mind had come to, in regard to the thing he was proposing to do, was entirely adverse to the doing of it. And so he gets the rebuke contained in our text. Perhaps we may all find a hint in the manner in which the Saviour replied to Peter, as to the manner in which our minds ought

to act in view of those doings of God which seem to us, contrary to justice and propriety. So long as we can assign reasons for the doings of God, so long as we can account for them by any of those rules or tests which we are accustomed to make use of in our judgments of things, the religious mind at least, will always be glad to stand by the policy of God; and to maintain that it can be made to cohere with the principle of rectitude and benevolence. But sometimes it happens, as Peter thought it had happened in the case before him, that the policy of God, as developed in his providence, cannot be vindicated to our minds, by any of the rules or tests which we are accustomed to make use of. Sometimes, his doings baffle us utterly. Sometimes they seem to contradict diametrically our ideas of rectitude and benevolence. Sometimes we are disposed to start back in amazement as we see them evolving themselves to view in the facts of life, and we are ready to put forth the hand to arrest them; and to do this as we suppose, under the promptings of the same jealousy for the honor of God which made Peter protest against what seemed to him the unbecoming procedure of his Master. Events which thus come athwart the line of expediency as human judgment draws it, are continually occurring. Our faith in God, or at least, in the doctrine which teaches that his agency is concerned in the ordering of our lot; is continually tried to the utmost by the turns in our affairs which perplex and confound us. What is it, that God is doing, we are constrained to ask in profound bewilderment, as we see one thing after another coming to pass in the world which, to our view, has no place in and no congruity with any wise or merciful scheme of life! We have only to recall circumstances which have occurred within the recollection of us all to find illustrations of the way in which the course of Providence staggers our minds, by its anomalous developments. What are we to do,

when confronted with these? Are we to deal with them in the same positive tone, in which we deal with those doings of God, which we can demonstrate to be right and beneficent, and therefore adjudge to be so; and adjudge those to be wrong and injurious? Are we to give sentence against the policy of God, on the one hand, in just the same categorical way in which we are accustomed to give sentence in favor of it, on the other? What are we to do with these cases, in which the operation of God's Providence is so much at variance with our ideas of justice and propriety, that we cannot vindicate it to our minds by any of those rules or tests, which we are accustomed to make use of? The text seems to afford an explicit answer to these questions. It says to us, "check the judgment which your mind is ready to pronounce! Hush the word which is ready to give it form and substance! Wait, wait diffidently, wait patiently, wait long, before you venture to declare anything which you see God doing, wrong and injurious!" This is evidently the import of our Lord's address to Peter, "what I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." It was meant to lay a curb upon the boldness of his spirit, to remind him that he was going entirely ahead of his intelligence, in the conclusions he was forming; that his mind was rushing presumptuously to a judgment, in a case where it was his duty to suspend his judgement, and wait till his intelligence should enable him to think and speak safely.

This duty it may be fairly argued, applies to us all, in those cases where the disposition to condemn and reverse the doings of God is asserting itself in our breast, from the fact that the reason assigned by our Lord for enjoining it upon Peter, applies equally to us in those cases. It may help us, perhaps, to acknowledge this duty, and to be more willing to endure patiently those procedures of Providence which we cannot comprehend, if we consider a

little these reasons. The first we may find in the expression "what I do thou knowest not." Emphasize the two pronouns in this expression, "I" and "thou," and then reflect upon the characters in which the two parties represented by them stand to each other, and you will see the force of this reason. The "I," as the Saviour uses the word, means God; and the "I" who is showing to you his doings, in all these mysterious developments of Providence, is the same being. And the "thou," in the Saviour's remark, and the *thou* addressed in all these doings, is man. "What I, God, do, thou, man, knowest not." You have but to look at this proposition, to see that it contains a self-evident truth. The moment you take account of the distinction which lies necessarily between God and man, you must confess that the acts of God, and the policy which executes itself through those acts, must be expected to transcend the intellectual discernment and the judical sagacity of man. Would not that distinction be obliterated entirely, if it were required of God to say always to man, "what I do, thou knowest;" or if it were permitted to man to say always to God, "what thou doest, I know?" Would not God in such a case, appear descending to the level of man, or man appear rising to that of God? But God and man are infinitely separated and separated by the infinite superiority of God to man. Man's knowledge of God, is in fact, little more than a knowledge of his ignorance of him. His searches after him only convince him that none by searching can find him out. Now this theoretic difference between God and man must express itself in the works of God. If God himself is something to be wondered at by man, his workings may be expected to be wonderful in the eyes of man. "What I do, thou knowest not," we may expect to hear him continually saying to man, in the methods of his Providence, concerning man. And accordingly this is just what we do hear him

saying in those procedures over which we stand in such perplexity, and against which we are disposed to protest with such impatience. Such perplexity and such impatience ought to find their cure in the very cause which excites them. To complain of these procedures, because we do not know them, because we cannot explain them and justify them to our minds, is to insist that God's doing shall contract itself to the scale of man's knowing. Is not this an abandonment of our theory altogether? If our conception of God, as a being who is infinitely different from us and infinitely superior to us, is right, ought we not to be surprised, nay, more than surprised confounded and thrown utterly adrift in our faith, if there were found nothing surprising in the manner of God's acting, in his providence? Be not surprised then at the most surprising things, which appear in his acting. He gives you the explanation of them all, at least he gives you the rationale by which you may consent to them all, when he says in connection with each one of them, "it is I, God, who am doing this, and it is thou, man, who art trying to understand it."

The recollection of this essential difference between God and man will lead us to go further, however, than to accept without surprise, the appearance of anomalies in his manner of acting. It will require us to admit that it lies with God, entirely, to determine upon what occasion and in what ways his policy shall differ from that which we are disposed to lay down for him. Assuming it as a conceded postulate, that God's doings must to an indefinite extent, vary from the scheme or plan which man's judgment has prescribed for them, the question may still be raised, "who shall decide as to the forms and seasons in which these variations in his doings from the scheme or plan which man's judgment had prescribed for them, shall take place?" Is it the prerogative of God to do this? Or may man put forth a

claim of this kind, "I know that what thou doest, I must expect often times, not to know, but, I claim the right of choosing the time and the methods in which these incomprehensible things shall be done by thee?" Does not the mere propounding of such a question solve it? "Of course," you say, "if I am to look for differences in the manner of God's acting, from what I would have desired or recommended, it devolves upon him to determine when and how those differences shall be manifested. For if the right belongs to me, to fix the time and methods, in which they shall be manifested, am I not, after all, inhibiting him from differing from me at all, and insisting upon his doing what I desire and recommend?" But the question, which is thus so easily answered, when we look at it in the face, is nevertheless treated by us practically as an open question. And hence it continually happens, that men who are accustomed to say "we know that what God does must oftentimes be incomprehensible to us," when some particular incomprehensible thing occurs in the doings of God concerning them, cry out in petulant surprise, "we did not expect this! We cannot consent to this! We admit that our knowing cannot be the measure of God's doing, we are prepared to see variations between his manner of acting, and that which we had prescribed for him; but, this particular doing of his we were not prepared for; or at least, not at this particular time. This thing, in just this way and at just this epoch he ought not to have done;" and so in their hearts, they protest against it. What is this, but to treat the question as to who shall decide in what respect God's policy shall differ from man's, as an open question, or rather as a question which has been settled by assigning to man the right of deciding in the case? But, as we have seen, this is a false conclusion. If God must be allowed to differ from us, he must be allowed to differ from us just in such ways, and

just at such times as he pleases; and when we consent to the proposition, "that man knoweth not what God doeth," we must consent to all the incomprehensibleness which may attach to the time and the manner of his doing each particular thing that he does. "What I do thou knowest not," means this, that over all that is inscrutable in the seasons and the methods he selects for doing the strange works of his Providence, we must stand reverently still, and stay the precipitate motions of the spirit which would rise up and pronounce judgment against him.

And now, it ought to be noticed that this requisition is not laid upon us as a mere edict of authority. Whilst the thing done by God, may be something which we do not know, and whilst it may be argued of anything done by God, that man is not authorized to condemn it, though he does not know it, there is a certain species of evidence presented to the mind, in the fact that God has done anything, that must operate powerfully to persuade it that the thing must be right. No matter how wrong it may look in itself we feel that we are warranted in believing it to be right on the simple ground that God has done it. There is what we call, the credit of personal character, a reason for trusting in him, residing in an individual himself. We act under the influence of this credit continually in our judgments of things done by our fellowmen. We say of a statement which has in it an air of improbability, "we believe it, unlikely as it sounds; because it is reported to us by a man who is noted for his veracity." We say of some act, which seems, as it strikes our eyes to be in violation of the laws of fair dealing, "we should pronounce this a dishonest act, if it had not been done by a man proverbial for his honesty." As it is, we are sure there must be reasons which would justify the doing of it, if we knew them." Now the demand which is made upon us, for a suspension of

judgment, for a patient reserve in the entertaining of suspicion as to the rectitude and propriety of those doings of God which we cannot understand, is commended to us pre-eminently, by the character which belongs to God. All the credit which is due to that, appeals to us to believe that whatever he does, however sinister may be the aspect of it, is right and kind. "What I do thou knowest not," contains an affirmation as well as a negation. The thing done may not be capable of being known, but the person doing it may be known, and known in such a way, as to communicate a certain amount of perspicuity to the thing done. When God says of a thing "that is what I do," though it lies before you wrapped in mystery, the dark object gathers around it a sort of corona of light, in virtue of that mere saying. "Thou knowest it not," he may add; and the echo of the words may sound in reverberations of pain, from all the chambers of your heart. "Yes" you may sigh back again, "I know it not! I cannot understand it! My mind can find no intelligible point in it, upon which to rest, no lines or feature in it, with which to associate it with its ideas of rectitude or kindness. I can only gaze at it in blank bewilderment as one awakens from the stunning shock of a fall into a dark cavern." There it may lie before you, a horrid blot upon the fair page of your life, like the smouldering ash-heap, telling where the sweet home of yesterday stood; like the sulphurous fissures ploughed by the earthquake through the squares of the populous city; and you can only look at it with the stifled feeling of a heart full of thought which cannot take shape, or find vent in language, and murmur blindly "I know it not." But as amidst these echoes in the breast, you catch ever and anon the cadence of the other saying, "that is what I do," does not the pressure upon your spirit grow lighter? Does not the gloom begin to break? Does not the void seem to take the firm-

ness of standing ground beneath your feet? Can you not change your tone to a higher key, though it be still one of sadness, and say, "Yes, I know it not; but I know him who did it. I know that he does all things well. And with my faith resting on him, I will try henceforth to judge his act by himself," and to say, "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it?" Ah, there is an infinite relief to the soul sometimes in getting to this point, where it can look out upon its sorrow, not upon the cheerless side represented by the exclamation, "I know it not," but upon the brighter and more definite one represented by the exclamation "it was God who did it." For there is something tangible here, upon which, the trust, repelled by the forbidding aspect of the former side, can safely repose itself. We can consent to anything, as martyrs have done to the torture of the rack and stake, when we can extend to it, and cover it with the same faith, which we know God is entitled to receive at our hands.

But a second reason for exercising a reticent and waiting spirit under these anomalous developments of Providence is given us by the text: "What I do thou knowest not *now*, but thou shall know hereafter." Emphasize in this instance, the two adverbs of time, "now" and "hereafter" and you will find in this remark of our Saviour's several facts indicated, which, go to make a conclusive argument in favor of exercising that spirit which he enjoined upon Peter, and through him upon us all. First, there is a reference to that relation which subsists between the now and the hereafter by which the events which belong to the now are very generally made to depend upon a light which the hereafter throws upon them, for the manifestation of their true character. The thing done in the now, almost always projects itself in the hereafter. As it appears in the now, it is the seed deposited in the ground. The observer who from the

inspection of that process should undertake to give a description of the act of the farmer would represent that act in a most incomplete and insignificant form. He must wait till the hereafter discloses the results of the planting of that seed, before he can adequately describe the farmer's act. It is a common remark that history needs to be written by one who lives at a day posterior to the period of which he writes. To see things truthfully, on many accounts we must look back, we must have changed our point of view from the now to the hereafter. This rule holds good in an especial sense of the doings of God, with whom a thousand years are as one day; and who sees the end from the beginning. To judge of these as they appear in the now is to judge of them through an imperfect medium. We must wait till they have gone through their process of germination; till the sowing time has matured into the harvest time. "What I do thou knowest not now," he says, because the indications of the now are unable to convey an accurate impression of the real nature and bearings, not merely because God's doings necessarily transcend our knowing, but because, at the moment when they are first thrown before our eyes, they are not perfect. They have to grow and branch themselves out in the future, and show their fruitage after many days. God takes time if I may so express it; waits through a series of seasons in the execution of his plans. And he who would judge of them intelligently, must take time too, and wait till he can connect the issues of the future with the phenomena of the present.

But beyond the reminder that these phenomena of the present give us an imperfect basis upon which to found a judgment concerning the doings of God, the text contains in it, a promise, or an assurance that the questions of the mind which cannot be answered now, will be answered hereafter. "Though thou knowest not now, what I do, thou

shalt know hereafter." It is implied here that the thing can be explained. It has a meaning and a use. It fills an orderly place in the policy of God, and can be made to appear just as wise and just as right as that policy must be assumed to be. Though at present it looks incoherent and chaotic, and we can only say hopelessly "we cannot understand it," we can comfort ourselves with the thought "there is nevertheless, a sense in it," and the obstruction which prevents us from seeing it, belongs to the fact of the period at which we look at it, and may pass away with that period. The antiquarian gazing upon the inscriptions and hieroglyphics preserved on the walls of the exhumed palaces of Nineveh, is unable to explain them. But he is satisfied that there is significance in them. There is a key which can unlock the mysteries they enclose, and he waits for the disclosure of that key. It is hidden somewhere, and he expects it to come to light. To-day does not possess it, but to-morrow may. This generation may not find it, but the next one may. He is sure the world will have the benefit yet of the history which lies locked up in those legends of a forgotten tongue. So God's doings may appear to us illegible inscriptions, insolvable hieroglyphics; but as they come from his hand, we know they are products of mind, and of a mind that never utters anything unworthy of itself; and we may be sure the key to them is hidden somewhere, is held, in fact, in the same hand which traced the record. And should we, who have to gaze in blind ignorance at that record, never get the key, we can encourage our hearts to be patient in their ignorance, by the reflection that the key exists. But as I have intimated, we are allowed to entertain the hope, the assurance indeed, that the key will not always be wanting. The revelations of the hereafter may strip the book of God's Providence of that cryptic character, which it bears, as seen through the limi-

tations and obliquities of the now. Nay, our Saviour's words, if we may take them as enunciations of a general truth, affirm that they will. "Hereafter thou shalt know what now thou dost not and cannot know." We might almost have affirmed this to ourselves, in advance of the Saviour's words; for reason teaches us that every act of a rational agent has a meaning in it, and that its value depends upon its meaning being manifested. The concealment of its meaning cannot be the ultimate design of the doer of it, for in that case, he would aim virtually to undo what he was doing, to make of none effect the thing he was effecting. Concealment must necessarily be subordinate to something else, and must be expected therefore, to present only a temporary phase of the thing done. The thing which God does, which I do not know, I may confidently promise myself, I shall know hereafter, on this ground.

But a better ground for the same conclusions may be found in the definite teachings of Scripture. The probability is, that our Saviour meant to affirm it in the remark he made to Peter. The apostle Paul certainly affirms it, when he says in his first epistle to the Corinthians "we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that is in a future state of perfect being and development, then that which is in part shall be done away. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part but then I shall know even as also I am known." The hereafter which lies before God and us, in which he may open to our understanding the dark things of his providence, is a long one, my friends, and if the opportunity for doing this, is not found on this side the grave, there is ample space for it to present itself in, on the other. Sometime and somewhere, the result is to be demonstrated, that "all things work together, for good to them that love God;" all things, these things which, now

we know not, as well as others, and when that time and place are reached whether on earth or in heaven, there is no doubt, that the problems which have distressed, and perhaps exasperated us, at the moment or throughout life, will all be made clear, and the hard ways of God will be found to have been always soft and kind.

And now if anything further is needed, in order to persuade the tried and tempted sufferer to withhold the judgment which would impugn the wisdom or goodness of God, it may be found perhaps in these few supplementary thoughts. Consider I would say to him, that this attitude of waiting upon God, of holding on to him in trust, where you cannot follow him in intelligence, is capable of serving a most important purpose as a part of your spiritual tuition. Your soul has probably never got into such near contact and communion with God, as it reaches when standing in that attitude. You are cleaving to God, then personally and for his own sake. You have clasped him then in the embrace of your spirit, directly, not through the medium of signs and symbols, not by the aid of things, through which you have apprehended him, but rather, in spite of things, for things here have been throwing obstacles between you and him, were not giving you knowledge, but plunging you into doubt and confusion. Not through their help then, but in the face of them, and by an effort which overleaps them, you have found your way to the great centre and support of all stability and order in the world, or in the human soul. You have pressed through the ranks of ordinary interpreters, through whom you have been wont to be introduced to God, for these interpreters in the present juncture have grown dumb, and thrown yourself right at the footstool of God, crying out, "be Thou the interpreter of Thyself to me. As such I acknowledge, I adopt thee." The intercourse with him, to which you are admitted at such

moments, is as precious as that enjoyed by Moses on the mount, and as the result, though darkness may still lie over the providence you cannot solve; there will be a light left upon your soul, and perhaps upon your face too, which others may take cognizance of, which will attest you have gained largely in grace, though you have gained nothing in knowledge. And considering that such may be the result of the occasions for such intercourse, it may be well for God to send them, and well for you to avail yourself of them. The darkness which has been the effect to make us lean directly and simply upon God, may be after all the best sort of light to us.

Consider again, that in consenting to this ignorance in which you find yourself, in respect to the doings of God, you are not required abjectly to accept the degradation which accompanies ignorance. You do not have to take the place of the man without eyes. It is that only of the man who has eyes, but is for the time being in the dark. The difference between the two conditions is immense. It would be a monstrous outrage to ask you to consent to undergo the mutilation of having your eyes put out. It is often the proposition of kindness that requires you to consent to remain temporarily in a darkened chamber. Your very retention of the powers of seeing may depend upon your compliance with the proposition. Your abiding in your ignorance under God's dealings with you, is only thus a temporary confinement in a dark chamber. You endure it in hope. "A few days or weeks," you may say to yourself, "have only to pass, and then I shall see; and have perhaps an eye all the healthier for the brief deprivation of sight to which I have submitted.

And then once more, consider, that knowledge when it does come will have a value and a sweetness infinitely enhanced by its contrast with that ignorance of which you

have had such a bitter experience. You have often in life had occasion to feel how pleasant it is to say "I know after being obliged for a long time to say "I do not know," in regard to something which interests you. Especially if there has been a misunderstanding between you and a friend; if some act of his looks to you unexplicable upon any ground appropriate to the footing upon which you have stood to each other; and you have had to feel coldly and distrustfully towards him; and the mystery has been cleared up, until you could say, "I know it now, I understand, I approve of it entirely," what a thrill of joy has followed the discovery. Our conception of the blessedness of heaven is founded very much upon the contrasts we can see, it must present to our condition on earth. And if in heaven you are permitted to say, as beyond a doubt you will be, if not before, of the dark and trying doings of God which have obtruded themselves into your history, "I know them all now, all is clear, all has been right and wise and good." will not the brightness of that bright world grow immeasurably brighter by the vanishing of the cloud which your previous ignorance had wrapped about your spirit? Oh, blessed contrast to the mist and haze which envelopes us here, which blind our eyes with tears and choke our hearts with doubts, as we grope along our way. Will it not be much of heaven's joy to realize it? Be patient, then beloved and wait for the manifestation of the sons of God, the manifestation which God will make of himself as a Father to the children of his love! Endure the weeping of the night for joy cometh in the morning! You will praise God yet, for all that he has done that you know not! Praise him then now, because you know this! And so the hereafter may give something of its light to cheer the darkness of the now, and to enable you to say to God "thy will be done" when that will is saying to you, "what I do thou knowest not."

THE SHUNAMMITE'S REPLY.

AUGUST 13, 1865.

“And he said to Gehazi, his servant, Call the Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care: what is to be done for thee? wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.”—II. KINGS 4:12.13.

THIS reply of the woman of Shunem to the prophet Elisha's proposition, was as wise as it was beautiful.

It is worthy to stand side by side with the best apothegms of the Grecian philosophers. Diogenes has made himself famous by that curt rejoinder, “Get out of my sunshine,” made to Alexander the Great, when he asked him if there was anything in which he could gratify or oblige him; but it is questionable whether this reply of the woman of Shunem is not an intellectual gem of finer quality than that. If it has not so much of brilliant sparkle, it has more of solid lustre. It has less of pretension to deform it, and more of truthfulness to commend it. Coming from the source from which it does, it proves that there are more philosophers in the world than the world acknowledges; that the village matron, obeying her pure instincts, taught by her sober common sense, and above all guided in discernment and discrimination by a truly religious faith, can act under the inspiration of a wisdom as genuine and as profound as that which wears the academic gown, or dogmatizes in learned halls. There are philoso-

phers in the world who know nothing of philosophy, in the technical sense of the term; teachers all untaught themselves in the mysteries of dialectic art; uttering their oracles and establishing their canons without the prestige of a diploma; and yet, in their noiseless and unnoticed way, carrying the elements of life and health through society as the blood does through the physical frame. These philosophers and teachers are found perhaps, most frequently, among the female sex, of whom it has been said, they discover truth by intuition, rather than by argumentation. The probability is, that their simpler, more tranquil and more confiding nature leads them to eschew those heats of controversy and those entanglements of disputation, in which men are apt to be involved, so that their minds more honestly seek for truth, more directly march up to it, and more resolutely grasp it, when they have reached it. However, this may be, it will occur to everyone, I presume, that the reply made by the woman of Shunem, to the prophet, was one eminently fitted to come from a woman's lips. The matter of it, and the style of it, both, have a subtle quality about them, which seems to accord with such a course. A man in her position would hardly have made such a reply; or if he did, would almost certainly have put it in a different form. It required a woman's tact to make an argument without using a single logical step to unlock a problem, without going through the process of turning the key. "What is to be done for thee?" said the prophet. "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" "I dwell among mine own people," is her answer. Perhaps if she had been required to explain philosophically why such a fact constituted a pertinent and final answer to the prophet's proposition; why it demonstrated that she had no need of the favors he had to bestow, and no occasion to be introduced to the patronage of

the king or the captain of the host, she could not have done it. But the fact, nevertheless, to her own mind did seem to involve just these results, and apparently, it seemed so to the prophet too, for we hear no more of his proposition. "I dwell among mine own people," he accepts as a conclusive intimation that it lay not within the power of any service he had to perform for her, to make her lot in life, a more satisfactory one. The philosophical connection between the fact so affirmed and the results predicated upon it, it would be interesting to develop, but that is not my object on the present occasion. I wish rather to found a train of religious reflection upon the single principle, which, this fact, viewed in connection with these results, obviously and prominently illustrates, namely, that nature, in whatever system of life man has chosen to adopt, has made association with one's own people a main condition of development and perfection. Evidently, isolation and seclusion are not the normal states of man. He is not placed in the world, like the icicle, to hang cold and rigid under the eaves of a house; but comes into it, like the raindrop falling from the cloud, which is destined to blend with and melt into its fellows. The Shunammite dwelt not alone; otherwise, Elisha's question, "what shall be done for thee," would have suggested a definite request. "Give me the light of loving faces; give me communion with sympathizing hearts; give me an outlet to this pent-up and stagnant life, by letting it go forth and mingle in the currents of the general life of a people whom I call my own," would have been her reply. For the want of these constitutes a fundamental defect in the condition of any person and precludes the possibility of contentment in any well organized mind. The association, contemplated by this principle of which I am speaking, it needs to be observed, is something different from, and more specific than a mere

herding with one's kind; it is a dwelling with one's own people, a permanent, homelike, identification with those who belong to you. It is in this feature of it; that the whole emphasis of the Shunammite's declaration resides. She might have dwelt in a community from which, it would have been infinite relief to be separated. A simple conjunction of bodies does not make the association which nature requires. External juxta-position may have brought you in contact with those between whom and yourself, there is no internal accordance, and then, association becomes the worst sort of segregation, or severance; because, it is one, of which you are always made conscious; one which, by positive signs, is always pressing upon your notice. Never are you more truly and painfully alone than when in perpetual intercourse with those with whom you are not at one. Hence the law of nature, which forbids man to be a solitary being, not only requires him to associate himself with his fellow, but requires him to associate with his like. Even our common language indicates this, by making the verb "like," to a great extent synonymous with the verb "love." Our loving and our liking are one and the same thing. And as we can truly associate only where we love, we associate where we like, or where we harmonize with and resemble that with which we associate. Between unlikes there can be no association; because between unlikes, there can be no liking. Liking, or a standing towards one another in the relation of likes, is essential to all true association amongst men. When they dwell together, this will always be found as the bond of that union. Not that there might not be differences of manifold kinds, distinguishing individuals in these united bodies from each other, but broader than these differences, and overlapping them all, we may say, there will be great features of correspondance, great sympathies and harmonies, which hold them together as with bands and cords. And

in such a case, differences, in fact only serve to make the association more clear and striking. The members of a family, for instance, may be different from one another in many respects, and yet there will be certain capital points in which their likeness to, and their liking for, one another will appear; and the fact of the maintaining a union, amidst all their personal differences will only demonstrate more positively the existence of these points.

And now we may see how aptly the nature of a genuine association amongst men is expressed in the Shunammite's declaration, "I dwell among mine own people." The proper idea of association is realized when the parties to it, can say reciprocally, "we dwell among our own people." Those with whom they dwell are theirs; they belong to them; they are identified with them; because of this liking which binds them together. Each individual finds himself reproduced, as it were, in his neighbor; sees himself multiplied, as it were, in the whole brotherhood with which he is associated. No one can be less a stranger, or an enemy to himself, than himself. But the like of himself, will be no more a stranger, or an enemy to him, than himself. The like of himself, he may be assured, will be as truly allied to his interests as he is himself. Hence as he would say of himself, "I am mine own," so he may say of him, "he is mine own." And hence, it will follow, that the securities for his well being will be extended in proportion to the extent in which he is associated with these—his likes. A common danger threatening a company on board a ship, makes them for the time being, a company of likes; they are animated by one spirit, occupied with one intent, devoted to one object; and what is the result? Association adds to the security of each by giving to each the benefit of the thought and the effort of the whole. While any one of the company, single-handed, might be helpless in the

presence of danger, encircled and identified, as he feels himself with the power of the whole band, he may be able to assure himself confidently of a triumph and deliverance. So this Shunammite, taking in with a glance of her mind, the possible vicissitudes which might be comprehended in her life, satisfies herself that the best guaranty she can have for her well-being, the best ground for security and contentment, lies in the fact, that she is dwelling among her own people. So thoroughly furnished and fortified, does she feel, by this association, that under the shelter of it, she can safely forego the advantages proposed to her in the tempting prospect of being introduced to the favor of royalty and enjoying the patronage of a court. Entrenched within this kindly citadel, which nature's wise hand had built and equipped for her protection, what need had she of the largesses of nobles or of kings?

Now the first special reflection which I wish to make is, that a principle which is found to possess such a value and potency in the economy of man's worldly life, may be expected to be introduced and put in service, in the economy of his spiritual life. The same expression, "I dwell among mine own people," which signified so much, as used by the Shunammite, will signify as much, perhaps much more, when used by the Christian. When uttered honestly and heartily, by him, it will go far towards proving that he is living spiritually, as a consistent, orderly, and contented man; or, in other words, that his religion is giving him actually that satisfaction and independence which in theory it undertakes to bestow. To show this, it will only be necessary to point out in a few particulars what is included in the sense of the expression, "I dwell among mine own people," as it may be used by the Christian.

First, the existence in the world of a people who are the likes of himself, in those points which distinguish him

as a Christian, is, of course, affirmed by it. We find this people referred to perpetually, and in a variety of terms in the Scripture. God recognizes their existence in the world. He calls them specifically, his people, his church, as those whom he has separated from the world and convoked or called together into an organic unity. They are characterized by a set of well marked peculiarities. They come from no special stock, have sprung from no particular locality, get their individuality from no merely outward incidence or condition. Their classification rests upon purely spiritual grounds. They have become a people, by reason of a common faith which they entertain; a common ingrafting into Christ, which they have experienced, and a common transformation of character and life, consequent thereupon. In these respects they are likes; and so are fitted for, and actually brought into association. This people are the "mine own people" of the Christian. And when he calls them so, honestly and heartily, he declares, in the next place, his identity with them in their unlikeness to the world, The necessity of being wholly on the Lord's side—of forsaking all to follow Christ, is recognized by him. Religion, with him, means the giving up of the heart to God, and the giving it up without compromise or limitation. It makes his relation to God, paramount to all other relations, domestic, social, or political. It leads him to adopt Christ's definition of loyalty in his kingdom, "he that loveth father or mother, houses or lands, home or country, more than me, is not worthy of me." And the general tenor of his life will show that his adoption of it is sincere. God's people are practically his people; and he is, practically one of them. He draws the same line of separation around himself that God has drawn around them.

Then in the third place, his affections are among them, His likings unite him to them. Spite of the personal

differences which may, in particular cases, sunder him from them, there are great vital bonds of concord which keep him in alliance with them. They and he, meet and harmonize, in Christ, their common head. In proportion as they are severally like him, he and they like one another. The differences are minor; their harmony is essential. He could not associate with those who have no faith in and no love for Christ, though agreeing with them in all other points. He could never say of them, "these are my people." There is a gap here between him and them, which is fundamental. He can and he must associate with those who do have faith in and love to Christ, whatever superficial differences may oppose their fellowship. They are Christ's, and that is the master tie, which binds him to them, and forces him to say, "after all they are my people."

And being thus associated, it follows in the next place, that his life assimilates itself to that common life by which the body specifically is distinguished. He is exposed to the same forces; surrounded by the same influences which give them their individuality. He breathes their atmosphere, subsists in their element. Nations, it is well known, have their characters, as well as persons. Certain causes produce them, and produce them so regularly, that the foreigner who comes to reside among a strange people, invariably catches their character. So the dweller among God's people will catch their character. Their memories, their traditions, their usages, their beliefs, their sentiments, their hopes, will all have a plastic power to mould and develop him into the type of being, which is special to them. Holy inspirations from the past, with its sainted dead speaking to him yet from their tombs; from the present, with its living examples of Christ-like purity and devotion, and its ever recurring tasks and tests of Christian principles and affections; and from the future, with its prospects of celes-

tial glory opening to the eye of the soul, invest him, and penetrate him, and circulate through him like life-currents, transmuting by their blessed alchemy the carnal that is in him into the Spiritual, and evolving into more and more distinctness of lineament and expression out of the earthly that is in him, the image of the heavenly.

And then to dwell among them, is to make common cause with this people in their labors; their enterprises; their occupations. It is thus, to get the exercise, by which the nature of the Christian man is trained and matured. Home has its toils which it exacts of its members. Country has its services, sometimes to the extent of periling life in the fighting of its battles, to demand of its citizens. And the performing of these toils, and the rendering of these services, gives intensity to those relationships, which identify the individual with his home and his country. So the Christian becomes more of a Christian, by the Christian work in which he engages. His character is rusted out by sloth and inaction. Hence he needs to be stimulated and borne along by the movements, in which the vital energy of the mass to which he is attached, employs itself. He needs to be a co-worker with those whose business it is to work for God. So he will on the one hand escape those torments of conscience and those suspicions as to the genuineness of his religion, by which, his mind must be thrown into perpetual disquietude; and on the other, gain that glow and fullness of spiritual health, which is both peace to the soul, and a proof of the soundness of that peace.

And then, to these, add this further thought, that the Christian dwelling among his own people, is dwelling among the means and agencies through which God has proposed most directly to communicate with him. He is dwelling on the very ground where God himself dwells. "Ye are the

temple of the living God," says the apostle, "as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Like the Bethel, where Jacob slept and where in his dream he lay at the foot of a ladder whose top entered heaven. The Christian's dwelling place, is a common ground where God and the soul meet and have intercourse. There God's presence continually enfolds the soul. There God lives and moves, in the soul's thought. There God speaks to the soul, by making his word articulate and effective truth. There God ministers to the soul in ordinances. There he lifts the soul to himself in worship. There he infuses the light of his love into cloudy providences, making the dark look clear to the soul, as he did to Asaph, when amidst the disclosures of the Sanctuary, he studied the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. There, by purpose and by promise, by memorial and by symbol, by consolation and by counsel, by the incidents of redemption, and by the procedures of his Spirit, he embraces the soul in the arms of his grace; draws it, as it were, to his bosom; imprints upon it the seal of sonship and heirship, and fastens upon it the impression of his own character, as he left the reflection of his own glory, upon the face of Moses.

Now, let these particulars, without enumerating more, be duly considered, and the inference may be safely drawn, that where they are found existing, there will be found as their result, a state of spiritual satisfaction and independence. The Christian of whom they can be affirmed, may be pronounced a consistent, an orderly and a contented man. In saying of himself, "I dwell among mine own people," he will be making a statement, which if true, will demonstrate his condition to be one which leaves little or nothing to be asked as a source of, or security for his well being. That principle of nature then, which the Shunammite's reply

enunciates, that association with one's own people, is a main condition of development and perfection in man, has been well taken notice of and put into service by God in shaping his economy of the spiritual life amongst men. Wisely he has gathered the subjects of this spiritual life together as a people; and wisely he has enjoined it upon them, to be united and to dwell together as brethren. Association is as necessary and as efficient in religion as in any other sphere in which man is called to act. His nature demands it, as a help to his spiritual as well as his temporal well being. As a Christian he wants his own people to dwell among; he wants the society of his likes; to make for him a home. The segregation, in any form, of themselves into classes by men, is apt to be odious in the eyes of the outside beholder. He is apt to see in it, only pretension or presumption. Segregation in religion is especially apt to be scrutinized unkindly, and to be ascribed to illiberality. And in a sort of generous scorn, as is supposed, for an exclusiveness founded on such base motives, the remark is not unfrequently made, "I want no church; I can act the Christian as well out of it as in it." Such cavils, to say the least of them, are made in ignorance. Those who make them overlook the fact that the church grows out of the law—as deep and broad as nature. The Christian, as a particular type of man, like man in every other type of him, wants a people among whom to dwell; needs them in order to his well being; that is, his comfort and perfection as a Christian. The principle of association applies to him as well as other men; and as his enterprise exceeds in importance all others in which men can engage, above all other men he needs to avail himself of its aid. This God knew, when he instituted a church in the world; when he gathered his children together under a family organization. And every sincere and earnest Christian knows

it; knows it, as he knows those new and profound likings by which he is made a Christian; knows it, as he knows the defects and the desires; the infirmities and the aspirations of his own soul. The philosophy of the Shunammite will be carried into his religion; and he will know that he is assuring himself, that all is right in that religion, when he can say most truly and most fervently, "I dwell among mine own people."

And now, I wish to take this expression of the woman in the text in a somewhat different sense from that of a law under which I have thus far considered it. I wish to take it as the utterance of a prophecy, or the statement of an event, which is not fully realized in the present, but is to be in the future. If it be a law, that like must associate with its like; and if such association between certain given parties, is found to be only proximate, at any given stage, the conclusion seems to be required, that at some future stage, the association will be witnessed in a complete form; and thus a law, with little modification, is converted into a prophecy. On this ground, the expression, "I dwell among mine own people," as uttered by the Christian, carries with it the force of a prophecy. The Christian utters it under a deep conviction that in connection with such an association only, will the condition requisite to the perfection of his being, be found. A vital want of his nature is enunciated in that expression. All through life, men are acting under the pressure of a similar want. They are trying to find, the community where their liking shall be satisfied. They are looking for their own people—for that homogeneous race; that congenial fraternity, in which their life may embosom itself in the universal life. Hence we have the common attachment to home, to neighborhood, and to our native land. Hence the cosmopolite, the man without a dwelling place, is looked upon as a melancholy prodigy. Still it

must be confessed, that this quest is never entirely successful. The associations to which men attain are only proximate—never complete. The dwellers together, are not sufficient likes to satisfy the demands of nature; or extraneous causes disturb their harmony; or the precariousness of the tie which unites them, mars the contentment which association, if known to be permanent, might afford them. “Pilgrims and strangers, on the earth,” after all the environments of home and neighborly society and country, is what they have to call themselves. Even the Christian, in his higher sphere, where there is so much that is deep and sacred in the relationships that enter into his peculiar association, has to feel that the association is proximate, rather than perfect. His own people as he finds them here, fall short of that ideal of a community of likes, in intercourse with which his soul shall find absolute harmony—to which his cravings look. His dwelling place too, is more or less a scene of unrest. His likings are not fully met by the provisions it offers him. The law which drives him to a people of his own, for perfect satisfaction, drives him farther than any region he can occupy in his present state. And is not that law then, a premonition and a pledge, that there is a region in a future state, where he shall at last find and dwell among his own people? Will not the Christian at last, be perfect, and be the companion of a race of perfect Christians? Will not likes, all made complete, in their complete likeness to Christ, all meet at last in some blessed home? The law which tells us, that in associations men are to look for the perfection of their being, assures us that they will; and safer still, we have the word of God for it that they will. The Christian as he emerges at last into the fullness of a spiritual being, will emerge into a community where all are of the same stature, and mould, and essence, as himself. Perfected himself, he will behold

the conditions of his perfection fulfilled in the perfection of all with whom he is associated. And when this occurs he will be in heaven, for where it occurs will be heaven. "At last, I dwell among mine own people," will be perhaps one of the first expressions, by which the full heart of the glorified saint will try to utter forth its satisfaction when it reaches heaven. Yes; at last, believer, you shall know what it is to dwell among your own people! You could hardly call your staying with them on earth, a dwelling among them, for every breeze that blew by and shook the folds of your tent, reminded you that you were a wayfarer camping on his march, and not a dweller abiding in his home; and these your people were not all you desired in your people. Harmonies were interrupted too frequently by discords in your intercourse with them to let your heart be entirely content. Association with them left you still much to long for. And so it must ever be now. You must say, "I dwell among mine own people," in a mitigated sense. But you will know what it is to say this in a full and perfect sense hereafter; and your saying it now, if honestly and heartily said—if here, amidst present imperfections, God's people are adopted as your people, and you truly dwell among them, you may draw from your own consciousness of these facts as assurance, that hereafter and forever, in a heavenly home, with Christ and his perfected household, you will be permitted in a full and perfect sense to say, "I dwell among mine own people."

And now there is a converse to this picture, which fidelity requires me to notice. Like seeks its like we have seen. Like tends always to dwell with its like. Character calls for the aid of association to complete its development. You may know a man's character from that of the associates with whom you find him. You may know his associates from the character you see him exhibiting. Like finds its

way to like. This is true of the evil as well as of the good; true of the deniers of Jesus, as of the followers of Jesus. All beings as character classifies them, go to their own place—to their own people. This is the result of a law, which is working in all the worlds with which man is conversant or connected. It is the result of a law, as definite and as strong, as that which rolls the avalanche from the mountain's brow to the plain, or that which ties the planet to the sun. As you are associating yourselves now, dear friends, God, for it is Him we mean, when we speak of law here—God will associate you forever. What you like, and what you are like, you will dwell with forever, when the consummation of all things shall have come. Association, with a cord as irresistible as omnipotence, is drawing you to the final abode of the enemies of God, if you are not now the friends of God; and there, sometime and somewhere, you must find your level and your doom; and there, amidst that dismal companionship, the lament must begin which is never to end, "I dwell among mine own people."



THE LOVE OF GOD.

APRIL 5, 1855.

“He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is Love.”—
I. JOHN 4:8

THE Apostle makes use of this expression twice in this chapter, once here in the text, and again in the 16th verse; and in both instances his object is not so much to affirm a truth concerning God, as to sustain an exhortation addressed to the people of God. He is teaching the duty of mutual love amongst Christians, and he enforces his doctrine by this argument, that between God and his people there subsists a communion so intimate, that it leads to an assimilation in character and conduct between the parties. “God dwells in them,” he says, “and they in him.” so that what he is, they, in the nature of the case, must be. Now, he reasons, “God is love;” and as a consequence his people must be love too. Were I to make just that use of the text, therefore, which its place in the sacred canon indicates, I should treat it as one of the terms of syllogism—or as one of the links in a chain of argument; and its meaning and nature would have to be determined by its bearings upon the practical duty proposed in the conclusion, which it was designed to aid in enforcing. This is not the use, however, which I purpose to make of it. It has that about it which makes it well worthy of being made a subject of study by itself, apart from its connection with anything else. It is a proposition which is so suggestive and so interesting—it is a link which has so

much of the golden ore of theological truth in it, and so much of the polish and garnishment of heaven's grace upon it, that it is almost impossible for the mind to resist the inclination to forget for a moment the ulterior doctrine, for the sake of which it is introduced, in order to explore the deep and precious significance which is embodied in itself. And this is what I propose to do. I shall separate the expression, "God is love," from the context and scrutinize it, with reference to its own proper worth and import, as an independent dogma of inspiration.

We have then, God set before us as our subject, and the thing affirmed of him is, that he is love--a most important affirmation of a most important subject. It is not an affirmation, it will be observed, which undertakes to aid us in answering any of the questions which a bold or a curious philosophy is accustomed to ask as to the essence of God, or as to what kind of a being he is. On this point Scripture goes but a little way towards meeting our inquiries. It tells us, indeed, that "God is a spirit," and it requires us to describe him as an infinite spirit, an unchangeable spirit, and so on; but when it has put all these phrases in our mouths, and given all these formulas to our faith, we are constrained to confess that it is rather a knowledge of what God is not, than of what he is, that we profess. But of the character of God, which it much more concerns us to understand, the text does give us an intelligible and a satisfactory intimation. It puts the expression, "God is love," alongside of that other expression, "God is a spirit," and so relieves our ignorance as to his essence by the simplicity of the conception we are permitted to entertain as to his character. We may not be able to tell what God a spirit is, but we are able to tell what the spirit of that Spirit is, for we have it indicated to us by a word so easy of comprehen-

sion, so familiar and so grateful, as Love. Whatever God is that we cannot understand, he is one thing that we can understand, and that is Love.

The form of the expression, "God is love," requires us to carry our theory concerning him to this length, that he is always and everywhere, Love. It is impossible that he should ever be found in any position where it cannot be affirmed of him, he is Love; for what he is, is what you must find wherever you find God, and God is love. There can never be in him, therefore, anything which is inconsistent with, or adverse to, love. Just as when it is said by the apostle in the first chapter of this Epistle, that "God is light," it is added, "in him is no darkness at all," because darkness in the nature of things cannot co-exist with light. So, nothing that cannot co-exist with love, can ever be affirmed of God. Otherwise it would cease to be said of him, that he is love, as it would cease to be true of him that he is light if it could ever be affirmed of him, that in him was any darkness at all. Any theory or opinion, therefore, that contravenes in any particular, the idea that God, as to his character, is love, must be false. And any theory or opinion that comes short of making him, in every office that he exercises and every act that he performs, love, must be defective. It is not enough to say of him, he can love; he does sometimes love; or he has sometimes loved; for all these things might be said of him without there being any necessity for concluding that he is love. All these things can be said of almost any man; and yet it cannot be said of any man, he is love. God differs from man in this—that his nature is such that he does and can do nothing which cannot be reconciled with love, while man's nature is such that he can and does do many things which cannot be reconciled with love. Under all the forms in which God can be contemplated, the

ground-work of every picture is the same, that is, Love. We may discriminate amongst his attributes and speak of him, properly enough, as now a God of wisdom; now a God of power; now a God of justice; as a God of goodness; but it is love that is manifesting itself in every exhibition of his wisdom, power, justice and goodness. We may distribute his works into many chapters, but it is still love that operates in every particular one of his works. Find God where you will, it is love that you are bound to recognize—Love that you are bound to adore.

This is the doctrine of the text. And now, my first remark concerning it is, that it is a doctrine so vital, so radical, that we may say, all true religion in the world stands or falls with it. For true religion consists of such affections and such acts, entertained and performed by man towards God, as can only be called forth by a being who is Love. Let the terms of the Bible be so changed as to read everywhere, "God is cruelty;" "God is malevolence;" "God is hatred," and then let men be required to entertain such affections and perform such acts toward him as are implied in true religion, and they would resent the demand as an insult to their feelings, and an outrage upon their understanding. True religion requires men to love God, to honor God, to trust in God, to obey God, and to worship God; things which assume that God is a being who is worthy of being loved, honored, trusted in, obeyed and worshiped by men—things which are put in the category of moral impossibilities, the moment you give credit to such an idea as that God is cruelty, malevolence or hatred. Such an idea would inevitably be followed by a set of consequences which are the very antipodes of those which are the product of true religion. It would make men fear, and detest, and rage against God; not love, and honor, and trust in, and obey, and worship him. This has been the

effect of it universally in the heathen world; and the only religion which can be said to exist there (if religion it can be called), is therefore an oppressive and degrading bondage to superstition. The minds that cannot consent to this have no alternative but to fly for refuge to infidelity, and have no religion at all. It is the blessed mission of Christianity to reveal to the world a God who is love; and thus to lay the foundation of a true religion; and the only true religion on earth, has accordingly always been found following in the train of Christianity; because Christianity and only Christianity presents to men a God towards whom they can entertain the affection and perform the acts required by a true religion. The truth of the doctrine, contained in the text, might therefore be argued by the necessity of it, in order to the existence of religion. The truth of some things may be proved by the fact that the mind cannot admit the truth of the consequences which must follow if those things are admitted to be false. The consequences we say are false. They involve a violation of reason, or conscience, or the order of nature. They create a state in which it is not right, or not safe, for men to be found. They cannot, therefore, be submitted to. But if they are not submitted to, the principle or theory, out of which they have issued, cannot be retained. That must have been false which produced them. Thus a principle or theory which would lead to the result of expelling the only true religion from the world, would on this ground, be demonstrated to be false. It must be false unless the state of things, which we behold in heathen nations, is more consistent with reason and conscience and the order of nature, than that which we behold in Christian nations. But to exclude from our theology this doctrine, that God is love, would lead to this result. It would put the Christian nation where the heathen one now stands. It would

substitute for the religion which the believer in the Bible holds, the superstition which the ignorant Pagan, or the infidelity which the philosophic one, now holds. Surely truth, we argue, cannot lie in the direction of such consequences. It must be in the opposite direction. It must be on the side of that doctrine which upholds the true religion; it must incorporate itself indissolubly with the principle or theory that God is love. If men, then, would not have in the world such a state of things as would follow the absence of all religion, or downright irreligion, they must gather about and cling to this great central doctrine of the true religion.

But in order to do this, I proceed to remark, they will be obliged to gather about and cling to the Bible as an infallible guide and a supreme arbiter in the matter of religion. We need the Bible to proclaim to us with authority that God is love. We need a voice as commanding and as trustworthy as that of the parent is to the little child—a voice that carries with it in its very tone a demonstration which stills the questionings of the mind, and the tremblings of the heart, to fix our faith firmly upon this truth. For without the Bible, men could not assure themselves beyond a doubt (so as to have the full benefit of the conviction), that God is love. The nations who have not had the Bible to give them their theology, as I have said, have universally failed to apprehend and embrace this doctrine. Deriving their idea of the Deity from other sources they have in the exercise of a futile and ingenious superstition invented lords many and Gods many; but in all their Pantheon there is not one of whom it can be said, this being is love. And in Christian lands those who deny the authority of the Bible, who will not let their faith go beyond the point where the light of nature leads it, are found, generally at least, at some time or other question-

ing, not to say denying, the truth of the doctrine. Absolute confidence in it can rest only on the platform afforded by the Bible. For there are, beyond all controversy, things to be met with in the world, and things occurring in the experience of every individual, which seem to indicate that God is not love. There are difficulties, and great ones, too, which any mind must overleap before it can reach comfortably and securely the conclusion that God is love. It is easy for men with certain facts before them to believe that he can love, that he has loved, that he does love, but as I have remarked, these propositions do not express all that is meant by the formula, God is love; and there are other facts which men must look at, which seem to put an impassable barrier in the way of the mind that would go on to the extreme point of the truth presented by this formula. If God is love, the querulous and sceptical may ask, why are such and such things to be found in a world which he created and which he governs? Why was sin ever permitted to defile and curse the earth? Why is suffering allowed to exist? Why is the human heart strung with chords of sadness as liberally as with those of joy? Why is there a time to weep and a time to die, linked indissolubly to the time to laugh and the time to be born, in a man's history? Why does the shadow chase the sunbeam so constantly through every scene of life? Why does the fear of loss mar forever the enjoyment of possession? Why do the words, "till death shall you part," utter that sad prophecy of separation and bereavement in the ears of husband and wife, even as the vow of love binds them heart to heart at the altar? And why does the image of a hundred little hillocks in the grave yard break across the mother's vision as she presses her first born to her bosom, and check the gush of her rapture with the thought, "my child, too, may have to fill an infant's tomb?" These

questions point to facts, which will be hard to reconcile with the doctrine, God is love, by any process which does not call in the aid of the positive authority of the Bible. And this, I am sure, will be the testimony of all who have been placed in circumstances where they have had to test the matter by personal experience. Perhaps you have tried in your moments of pain and grief to rest your soul, as your religion teaches you to do, upon the consoling conviction that God who sent you your pain and grief, is Love. And you have searched out arguments, and you have constructed theories, and you have multiplied conjectures, and you have reasoned and reasoned, till in the endless mazes of your reasonings you have felt yourself lost; and the result of all has been that your mind has been perplexed and aggravated, rather than satisfied and comforted by the effort. And then you have let the Bible speak. You have let its authority come to your assistance. You have consented to believe that God is what he is revealed to be without limiting your faith to what you can prove him to be; you become the little child and you have received the word of inspiration as the parent's voice, and you have recognized in its tone a right to teach you, and a competency to teach you, and you have given credit to its declarations, because of its own character, and not because of any process of demonstration by which your mind had brought itself to adopt its declaration; and then, doubt has subsided, and conviction has been established, and you have felt sure that God is love. And knowing that the author of your pain and grief was such a God, you could be still patient, resigned, and tranquil, under his loving hand. Now, in claiming an authority for the Bible in this matter, I am only claiming for it what legitimately belongs to it as a supernatural source of knowledge, and what it always claims clearly for itself. It never refers to anything

outside of itself as a standard by which its communications are to be tried and estimated. What it says of God, in any particular, is fixed as truth by its mere saying it. It does not ask the superscription, the endorsement of the person to whom it speaks before it demands his belief. He is not the umpire before whom it must plead and argue, and whose judgment is needed to sustain and authenticate its communications, but he is the scholar to whom it is imparting information, and whose business it is to take the information given with a confidence proportioned to the merits of his teacher. The information may often be of a kind so abstruse or so complicated that his mind has no capacity to exercise judgment upon it; and in such cases he must defer his own judgment to that of his teacher—he must let his mind follow the mind of his teacher—he must take as truth what he cannot demonstrate to be truth—because he is sure that in the judgment of his teacher's mind, it can be and has been demonstrated to be truth. Speaking thus authoritatively then, the Bible tells us God is love; and the weight of its authoritative declaration comes to turn the scale and decide the controversy whenever our minds are disposed to waver between the evidences for and those against the doctrine. We take its decision, as that which we ought to form, and which our minds would be constrained to form were they in the position of that mind which speaks in the Bible.

But let me not be misunderstood in what I am saying. In referring thus to the authority of the Bible, as that which is necessary in order to assure our minds of the truth of the doctrine that God is love, I am not holding that the authority of the Bible is all the support we can find for the doctrine. Were this so, that is, were the positive dictum of the Bible all the evidence we had of the truth of the doctrine, or were there nothing in what we can

see and learn of God from other quarters to correspond with and confirm it, we should be obliged to reject the testimony of the Bible, not on the ground that it had not authority as the word of God to command our faith, but on the ground that it could not be the word of God. If in all the circle of his actions God never appeared as Love, but always as the contrary, we should pronounce the dictum of the Bible, that he is Love, a falsehood; and then with a falsehood proved upon it, it could not challenge our confidence as an infallible guide and supreme arbiter in the matter of religion; and there would be no room left for a question as to its authority over our faith. But the Bible has no such issue as this to fear. It stands on safe ground here. What it affirms of God, though its affirmation be not offered as argument, it always represents God as exemplifying in his actions. It shows the fruit cohering with the tree. When it says, God is love, it admits and encourages the appeal to facts. It tells us we shall find God actually loving, and loving under such circumstances as make it necessary to conclude that he is love; and it aids us in tracing out and comprehending the exhibitions of his love. It sets these before us in such abundance and variety that an examination of them would furnish matter for a volume rather than a sermon. It draws the veil, for instance, from that scene of being which in the language of man, we call the eternity of God prior to creation. Before the appearance of the angels, those eldest born of his children, to be objects of his love, we have a glimpse or two, an out-shining ray or two, of the life of God. And if we may presume to interpret these, they indicate as their prominent truth, that God was then Love. The doctrine of the Trinity--the three-fold personality of the Deity, mysterious, inexplicable as it is in most of its aspects, obtains at least a sort of coherence with familiar and intelli-

gible things, if we think of it in connection with this truth, that Deity is Love. For the conditions of love, the circumstances required for its exercise, to some extent, are presented to our view in the union of the three persons in the Godhead. A Deity who is love, is revealed in a fitting form, a form adapted to the fact at least, when he appears, not in the awful solitude of unmitigated unity, but in the fellowship of a co-essential Trinity. Such a form of subsistence makes it possible to say of God from all eternity he was Love. It gives occasion for the exercise of love, of which we read, when the Son, in the days of his incarnation, declared, "thou Father Lovedst me before the foundation of the world;" and it suggests a key to that expression of loving concord between coincident agents, contained in the saying of the Creator, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Not to dwell upon this unfathomable theme, however, we may pass on to those manifestations of God which have reference to the objects of time. And here, the existence of these objects fall in with the doctrine that God is love. For love is a productive principle. Creation is its proper work. Life radiating itself out into other forms of kindred life is the very exercise, by which it proves its existence. A God who is love is just the God who might be expected sometime to appear as God the Creator. All the acts of creative power he may have put forth we know not. All the beings whom in his love he has made we cannot enumerate; but we read of the angels who dwell in his presence, and we know of the existence of that lower race, for whose occupation, the world in its Paraisaical state was formed, and who still hold it, though under conditions so sadly changed. Spite of all in man's present position what seems inconsistent with love in God, man's original creation, is an act which can be reconciled with no other principle. And then look at innumerable

things, which even subsequent to the falling of the curse upon our race, continue in the system of nature and under the administration of Providence to attest the fact that God is love. Do we not see the tender parent yet, in the Being who is presiding in our world? Do we not find that sweet, that hallowed phrase, "our Father which art in heaven," in use amongst men, and does it not daily ascend from thousands and tens of thousands who feel in their deepest hearts, that there is a Reality to correspond with the phrase? And the loving kindnesses of the Lord, are there not those who still make mention of these, as the Prophet and the Psalmist were accustomed to do? Would hatred or cruelty or malevolence have contrived such manifold arrangements for the preservation and support of their victims, or granted them such an affluence of enjoyment as yet lies within the reach of fallen man? Would they have hung out this blue sky above him, or decorated the green earth beneath him? Would they have put music and beauty and knowledge and friendship in the world? Would they have provided food for hunger, and medicine for disease, and consolation for sorrow? Would they have kept hope alive in the human heart, and flung the rainbow over the cloud, promising a day of emancipation to the sin-burdened earth, a resurrection in glory to the dying body, and an eternal heaven to the sainted soul? Oh no. The Bible has facts to sustain it, patent and unimpeachable as the daylight, when it says God is love. But the great fact which it always puts in the foreground when discoursing upon this theme, and which most effectively demonstrates the love of God, is the scheme which has been devised and executed for the redemption of mankind. This fact the apostle couples immediately with his declaration in the text. "In this was manifest the love of God towards us," he says, "because that God sent his only begotten Son into

the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The Bible is full of such passages, I need not multiply them. I have said the Bible does not argue with men, when it speaks to them of God. It does not admit that there can be any doubt in regard to what it communicates. And surely I may say it takes ground infinitely above all necessity for arguing when it records such a fact as that which these passages indicate. With that fact on its pages argument would be superfluous—almost derogatory to its cause. The Bible leaves God's acts to confirm all it says of his character. It tells you that God is love. You may question or deny the dogma. It holds no debate with you. It does not want your assent. It calmly proceeds with its scroll of revelation, unrolling vision after vision, until, lo! the Son of God appears, descending to the earth and taking man's nature, that he may die for man's sin. This is the way the Bible speaks of God; and this is the way God confirms by his acts what it says of him. And who can doubt longer after such a confirmation? Could anything less than the expression God is love, describe a Being who has so loved the world? Could redemption through the death of the Son of God for a race of sinners ever have emanated from the heart of a being of whom it could be said, he is cruelty, hatred or malevolence? With the cross of Christ before us, can we do otherwise, brethren, than rise in our conception of God to that sublime altitude to which the text would carry us, and say, of his very nature, he is Love?

But it is to the practical hearing of this important truth that I wish now to direct your attention. I have said that this doctrine, God is Love, lies at the basis of all true religion, meaning theoretical religion. I would now say it lies at the base of all true personal religion. If

God is love, he deserves from men, as his reasonable tribute, all the love they can possibly exhibit towards him. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy mind, and all thy soul, and all thy strength," is therefore the first and greatest commandment—the fundamental law of piety. And if men have not observed it, they are sinners. They have wronged God. Now, tried by this text, there is no man who can escape conviction and condemnation as a sinner—a wrongdoer against God. And the question arises, what course of treatment is a person in such a position to expect at the hands of a God who is love? I answer, the love that can consist with a hatred of sin, and that frames statutes against sin, will proceed to the punishment of sin. And this is the meaning of those passages of Scripture which speak of God's anger, and vengeance and wrath. These are terms borrowed from human language; but they describe only God's love going forth to the punishment of sin. A God who did not punish sin could not claim the title of love. The whole universe would soon call him hatred, and malevolence and cruelty. They fall into a grievous error therefore, who persuade themselves that because God is love they may sin with impunity; or who use such declarations as the text as a proof of the doctrine of universal and indiscriminate salvation. And this is almost the fearfullest view we can take of the misery of the wicked in their final state, that they will have forced the love of God to turn their executioner, and kindle the flames of that consuming fire with which they are to be destroyed. But while the doctrine of the text gives no encouragement to the incorrigible sinner to hope for escape from punishment, it does lay a ground for the hope of mercy in the case of the sinner who repents. It is just because God is love, that the man who feels his need of mercy and wishes for it, is authorized to expect it. He

has no remedy for his evil condition in himself, no resources to which he can apply for relief and deliverance independently of God. But when, with the look of helpless want he turns to God, he finds him a God of love; a God who has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but would have all men come unto him and live. A view of the love of God, therefore, stands connected with that first step in personal religion—repentance. If God is not seen to be love, there can be no repentance, there can be no turning of the heart from sin to God, which is necessary to constitute repentance; and the bitterest pang in repentance—that which sends the iron of contrition deepest in the soul, is the thought that sin is seen now to have been committed against a God who is love, and who says in his tenderness to the sinner, “you may repent.”

And then, the doctrine of the text lays a foundation for the justification of the sinner, through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. A Saviour is the unspeakable gift of God's love. That allows a propitiation for sin, the intervention of a mediator, salvation by faith where there could be none by the works of the principal. When the sinner goes to Christ, he is placing himself within the pale of God's love, where there is no more condemnation to him, and from which nothing can separate him. His security that he will not be counted and treated as a sinner, is that God is love; and that in his love, he has reconciled him to himself through Christ who was made sin for him.”

And then, lastly, this doctrine secures to the believer all the control, and discipline, and assistance, which are required to carry him successfully through a course of religious living. Love is provident, and beneficent towards its objects. What they need for their safety or welfare it delights to bestow. Christian, this is your encouragement and your security—God is love. If he were not, you would

never have been standing where you are to-day; you would never have made such progress as you already have done towards heaven. He who has begun a good work in you means to carry it on unto the end. You have large resources in God, though you have none in yourself. Love is your guide; Love is your guardian; Love will chasten you when you need it; Love will raise you when you fall; Love will strengthen your weakness; Love will soothe your sorrows; Love will hear your prayers; Love will stand by your dying beds; and Love will present you at last faultless and complete before your Father's face. The beginning and the ending of your religion, the foundation and the top-stone of your salvation, are comprised in this precious truth—"God is love."



THE SAVED MALEFACTOR.

JUNE 3, 1860.

“And Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”—LUKE 23:43.

THE occurrence described here directs our attention in a very interesting way, first, to the source from which the divine mercy which is concerned in the salvation of man, proceeds, and secondly, to the extent to which its efficacy is applied. These will be the topics which I shall endeavor to illustrate in my remarks upon the text. Jesus upon the cross to the dying malefactor at his side says, “to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” These words in any proper sense which can be put upon them, must mean that this man should be saved; that in that eternal world into which he was passing, he should find safety and rest. Without insisting that the word paradise is precisely equivalent to heaven, admitting that it cannot mean that state of perfect blessedness into which the righteous are to be introduced, after the resurrection of the body, and for which this resurrection is a necessary preparation, there can be no doubt that the word describes a state that is heavenly in its kind. This, the import of the term indicates, and various other allusions in Scripture plainly signify. No one, upon a dying bed, could desire to have a better assurance of salvation, than to be informed upon divine authority that after death he was to be with Christ in Paradise. We should be perverting language, therefore, in a most arbitrary way, not to admit that this malefactor was a saved

man. Now consider the Saviour. Look at the person by whom the hope of life was given, and the word of life spoken, in this interesting transaction. Setting other circumstances aside for the present, observe:

First, that Jesus in speaking these words, is announcing to the man the forgiveness of his sins. Admission to Paradise is a privilege altogether inconsistent with the existence of guilt in the party admitted. The wages, the due recompense of sin, is death. So long as it is reckoned against any one, it can only expose him to condemnation. So long as it appears in a creature, and must be dealt with by God it must be treated by him as an abominable thing which he hates, and which he cannot therefore, receive into his presence. Salvation, therefore, always implies the remission of the sin of the person saved. Pardon is, indeed, a part of salvation. So that when our Lord said to this man "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," he was saying to him as plainly as if he had used the identical words, "this day or this moment thy sins be forgiven thee." And the question arises immediately in view of this fact, who is this that forgiveth sins? This question the Jews had asked more than once in reference to our Saviour, and they had coupled with it the charge of blasphemy; for they had reasoned rightly enough that none can forgive sins but God only. They understood that the right to remit sin was exclusively a divine right; that it is one of the prerogatives of the author of the moral law and the administrator of the moral government of the universe; and that the exercise of this right in any case, was an act which designated the agent as a divine personage. As they were not willing to allow this character to Christ, they protested against his claiming the right to forgive sin, and called him a blasphemer, a profaner of sacred things. But nevertheless, in full view of the construction which they put upon the act

(which he evidently admits to be correct) he proclaimed the fact, "the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sin." And here on the cross, amongst the things which he does in the very article of death, we may say, we see him revoking the guilt of this malefactor, and declaring to him that he shall enter eternity a pardoned man. Who is this that forgiveth sin? Again we ask. Who, but God himself? Who, but one who could have described himself in the language of Jehovah, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions?" And who could say of himself, "I and the Father are one?"

Observe again that in using these words "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," our Lord is predicating of this man an inward personal change by which he was qualified for the state into which he was to be introduced. That some qualification was necessary is evident. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." "The unclean cannot enter Paradise" for, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." Christ can have no fellowship with Belial. If this malefactor was to be that day with Christ in Paradise, obviously he must become a renewed being. The old man and corrupt nature must be put off; the flesh must become spirit; the Ethiopian must change his skin; the child of the Devil must be transformed into the child of God. And just such an internal change must have been implied in the event which the Savior's words made certain, that he was to be admitted to Paradise. You see then in this transaction another exercise of divine power. Who can know the heart, who can cleanse it, who can convert it; but God? This changing of the nature by which men are prepared for heaven is represented in Scripture as a creative act, so that the subject of it is said

to be a new creature. It is the province of God alone to effect it; and when Christ appears definitely determining the destiny of this dying thief, as an heir of Paradise, he appears in the exercise of a power, which no one but God could claim to possess.

Then once more observe that he speaks in the language of one who holds the keys of the eternal world, and decides with imperial authority upon the doom of man. "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Who can claim jurisdiction over the realm of the disembodied spirits, who can open the chambers of heaven and hell, who can give the title that admits to the one, or issue the warrant that confines in the other, but God? Just here perhaps, lies the most sacred function and right of the divine majesty. Just here is the spot where encroachment or usurpation could be least tolerated. The administration of justice, the application of law, the decision of questions touching the standing, the desert, the destiny of the subject under the government of his Maker, these things are acts which God cannot put out of his own hands. The balance of judgment, equally with the sceptre of sovereignty, is something which he must keep inviolable. The award that assigns heaven to any departing soul must be the decree of his own tribunal, and the utterances of his own lips. Who then but God could have pronounced these words "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Now the conclusion to which we are brought by these considerations drawn from the nature of the act is that the agent, in the transaction before us, was a divine being. The Savior, concerning whom we are inquiring, was God. But there are other features in the incident to be noticed. In connection with all these facts, which demonstrate that the Savior of the malefactor was God, there are other facts which demonstrate, no less conclusively, that he was man.

What do your senses tell you of him? That he is a sufferer; that he has a body which can feel pain; that he is now enduring the agony of the cross; that human blood is trickling from the brow which the thorns have pierced; and from the hands which the nails have torn; that he thirsts, languishes and dies. And what does history tell you of him? That for many years he had been undergoing the vicissitudes of human experience; subject to want and infirmity like other men; panting in weariness by the wayside; asking food and shelter in the homes of his friends; shedding tears in sympathy with the mourner; acknowledging the force of domestic ties, and submitting to the burdens laid upon the citizen. It is a true man who now looks upon the pleading penitent at his side, and says "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Our conception of the Savior must therefore recognize in him this character. In the one person of Jesus, we must with equal distinctness behold a divine and a human nature. The Savior will not have been defined as the evidence requires him to be, unless we affirm of him both propositions, he is God, and he is man. Had it been a mere man, nothing but a fellow mortal who had spoken to the poor malefactor those gracious words, they would only have mocked his woe. If they cheered his fainting spirit with hope, if they threw a flood of light over the dark path to eternity which he was treading (as we may well believe,) it was only because he heard in them the voice of God, because he recognized in Jesus one who was the express image of the Father and who spoke with all the authority of Jehovah. It was of course a very extraordinary faith which led him to do this; but any one can see, who will reflect a moment upon the circumstances of the case, that an extraordinary faith lay at the bottom of every incident in the transaction. Nothing but an extraordinary faith could have made him look upon

Jesus, as he appeared at such a moment, as able to render him any service; and when that faith could go the length of saying, "Lord remember me when thou cometh into thy kingdom," we may be sure it had reached that elevated point of view which made him see in Jesus the very person and nature of God.

But while we acknowledge the legitimacy of the idea that he who pardons sin and promises eternal life to this dying thief, is truly God, we are constrained to conclude that his humanity, also, has an important part to take in the procedure; and that the result, the salvation of man, is due as much to what the Savior does as man, as to what he does as God. You feel at once that the mercy of God would not have spoken itself forth, so to speak, from such a spectacle of suffering, unless that suffering had had an intimate and necessary connection with the exercise of mercy. And this is the great doctrine, I conceive set before us, in this transaction, that it is through the suffering of the cross that the mercy of God is communicated to sinful man. This thief was assuredly to be saved; and his salvation was made certain by the fact that it was God who had determined the event by his authoritative decree. But upon what ground, or consideration was the decree of God determining the event, based? The answer to this question is found in the sufferings of Christ. His death was the procuring cause of the mercy which exhibits itself in the gift of pardon and eternal life. The waters of salvation flow from a smitten rock. The sacrifice of Jesus was a propitiation, a sin offering, a ransom, a transaction in which the victim appears as the substitute for the offender, and undergoes in his stead, the penalty due to his sins, so making satisfaction to that justice which having annexed death to sin as its rightful reward, can never forego or relax its stern demands. You may search the Scriptures through

and this is the explanation which you will find everywhere recorded of the humanity and the human experience of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came into the world to save sinners. These glad tidings men are willing enough to credit. But how did he come? What is implied in his taking our nature, and sojourning in our world? O, how few minds seem to understand and realize this! Just what you see upon the cross, this fearful spectacle of woe, and this culmination of a long and diversified career of woe; this is what is meant by Christ coming to save sinners. You could have no Savior without the cross; no vision of a compassionate God without the vision of the suffering man, Christ Jesus. Mercy to every pardoned soul, flows from precisely the same source, as that from which it flowed to this penitent malefactor. Precisely what he saw when he uttered that believing prayer, "Lord remember me," every sinner upon whose heart the light of a sound scripture hope of salvation has dawned must have seen; must have looked at by the eye of faith, Jesus, the Lamb of God, expiating upon the altar the sin of the world; Jesus enduring the curse of the law that he might redeem those who were under the curse; Jesus giving himself, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Just as distinctly as the serpent, lifted up in the wilderness, was looked upon by the poisoned Israelites, and bailed as the source of healing and life, Christ crucified is held up in the Gospel as the object of the sinner's trust; and is received and depended upon by every true penitent as the source of pardon and salvation. That same voice, tremulous with the death pang, which said to the thief, "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," speaks still to the sin-burdened soul, and assures it of the grace that saves it. The key-note in the anthem of mercy, is still the wail of Calvary. The balm that restores the dying malefactor to life is still the blood of Jesus. And thus, Deity and humanity wondrously

combine in the Savior who delivers the sinner from death. It is the God who proclaims the decree of pardon and gives the title to heaven; but it is the suffering of the man which furnishes the foundation of the decree; and then again, it is the dignity of the deity which makes the sacrifice of humanity effectual to its end, and invests it with that peculiar value which makes it able to atone for the sins of the world. And what a source of hope and comfort it is—which is thus presented to the view of the anxious, desponding sinner! How complete, how sure, how simple, and yet how divinely wise! What mind would even have conceived of it—and yet what mind that intelligently looks at it can fail to see its perfect propriety and its infinite efficacy? With such a Saviour, made his own by that appropriating faith which is described as the only condition of enjoying the benefit of his offices, who can doubt that his salvation is secure? And who, my friends, dare hope for salvation in any other name, or from any other source, while this Saviour is thoughtlessly neglected or arrogantly despised? Can such a vision as this of Christ crucified ever be forgotten by the soul which has once intelligently apprehended it? Can the eye that has once fastened its gaze upon the cross, suffer anything to interrupt its view? Must it not linger about such an object with a reverence and delight that familiarity, instead of abating, only makes more intense, until in the great catastrophe when all other objects shrink into nothingness in the fell eclipse of death—this shall be to the departing believer like a pillar of fire, filling the horizon with its lustre, and flooding the dark valley with its celestial glory? Just that then which the Christian's heart, if not directed to all its renewed instincts, will see, and love to remember, God by the ordinances of his house has made it its duty to remember. The Lord's supper is a festival of Remembrance, enjoined upon all who

have been led to utter the cry, "Lord remember me;" and as often as the believer participates in it, he deepens his impressions of the reality and the significance of that event. He studies anew the story of his redemption—he discerns the Lord's body or gazes upon the person of his divine Saviour, and through the emblems which he receives, he embraces and appropriates the blessings of pardon and salvation offered to him as the purchase of his death. We cannot wonder that God instituted such a sacrament in his church, and we cannot wonder that all spiritual Christians have loved it and have been wont to connect with it some of the deepest and happiest experiences, and we cannot but think that those men are chargeable with great inconsistency or great insensibility, who profess to believe in Christ and to depend upon him for salvation, and yet deny the obligation they are under, to remember and honor him in this ceremonial of his own appointment.

With this glance at the source of the divine mercy, as exercised in the salvation of men, let us now look for a moment or two, at the other topic—the extent to which this mercy is applied. This too is well illustrated in the incident referred to in the text. From the person of the Saviour we now turn to the person saved, and inquire who is he? The facts concerning him are few; but they are sufficient to warrant us in taking him as a representative of two extremes, one of guilt, and the other of helplessness.

First, he was a criminal. Matthew calls him a thief—by which he means a bandit— a highway robber. His crimes had been such that they had exposed him to the heaviest penalty human laws could inflict; and by his own confession the punishment was just—for he says to his companion in suffering, "we are receiving the due rewards of our deeds." He was no doubt a monster in wickedness. According to the narrative of other evangelists, it would seem that he in

common with the other malefactor, had at one time joined with the crowd in mocking and deriding Jesus. If so, this was another evidence of the recklessness and brutality to which he had been reduced. Probably no eye pitied him in all that multitude. The country felt relieved in seeing him consigned to vengeance, as if a tiger had been cast out of its fold. He had made war upon his race; and every one was glad to know that the universal foe had been at last overtaken with judgment. But during the protracted period of his sufferings, a better spirit awoke in his heart. All things are possible with God; and the nature even of such a man was not too depraved for omnipotent grace to change it. There are many ways in which we may suppose the truth which is unto salvation had been lodged in his mind, and many ways in which the power of God can make the smallest germ of truth work—and work rapidly too—like leaven in the lump, till it issues in the radical conversion of the subject. Certain it is that this bold and flagrant sinner became an humble suppliant for mercy, and recognized in Jesus the source from which this mercy was to come.

But now observe the other feature in his condition, his helplessness. What could he, poor impotent wretch, do to make himself just in the sight of God? The last hours of his miserable life had been reached; his pulse was growing feebler every moment; keen pains were racking his body; he was fastened motionless to a cross. Labors and offerings—alms, deeds and penances (could such have availed to propitiate the Deity into whose presence he was passing)—were now all out of the question with him. It was too late to gain salvation by any meritorious work, had such a thing been possible, at any time. His burden of guilt was pressing consciously upon him, and eternity with its retributions was just before him; and nothing within the compass of his power could take the burden from his soul, or

keep it from weighing him down to the pit of Hell: What a picture of utter helplessness the man presents! What is there for him to do, but to groan out his few lingering moments in horror, and then die in despair. There was one thing, which by some blessed intimation of the spirit of God it was revealed to him, he could do, notwithstanding all his guilt and helplessness—and that was to cast himself upon the simple mercy of God, and to invoke the offices of Jesus as the channel through which this mercy might be bestowed. This method was pursued. With a penitent and contrite spirit, overwhelmed with his sense of sin, and making no attempt to present the shadow of a righteousness of his own before God, he turns his eye to the Saviour. He directs his prayer to him. With a faith that surmounted all the obstacles which the present condition of the Redeemer presented, he recognized him as the Son of God and the King of Israel—as one who in the character of judge and sovereign had power to grant him remission of sin, and deliverance from eternal death; and he ventures to pour forth the petition, “Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” And, O, miracle of mercy, that petition brought the boon he sought! All that he had dared to hope for in that wild effort of his soul, springing from the very verge of perdition to seize, if it might be with the violence of desperation, the prize of eternal life, all that he gained; for like the voice that once stilled the noise of the tempest and the tumult of the sea, the accents of Jesus fell sweetly upon his soul, announcing the wonderful result, “this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” Behold here the extent to which the mercy of God, which has its source in Christ crucified, can be applied! Much as the Gospel tells us of the efficacy and the freeness of divine grace, this illustration, me-thinks, has been given us as the crowning demonstration of these glorious truths.

This is the monument erected upon the field of revelation, designed to show a world of sinners that there is no other limit to God's readiness to save them, than that which grows out of the depravity of their own hearts—their own wilful, persistent and infatuated love of sin. There is no ambiguity in testimony like this. There is no mistaking the import of such a procedure. You can all recall with little difficulty the scene described in the text. The parties and words and transactions are all real. Whatever doctrine is taught here is taught under the form of fact. That sinner was pardoned and saved; and he was saved by one who acted in the name and with the authority of God; and whose action was based upon all those extraordinary circumstances which characterized the sacrifice upon Calvary.

In many respects the position of this malefactor is a type of that of every believing child of God. First of all, it was from a similar condition of danger that every one of you who are this day rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, has been delivered. Conversion in every case is a passing from death into life. You were bound by the same responsibilities as those which were drawing that criminal to the bar of God. You were in your state of unbelief, condemned already. The wrath of God was abiding on you. Though you had not committed the precise sins of the thief in the text, you know from a revelation that has been made to you of your heart and your life, that there was sin enough in you to have classed you with the enemies of God, and to have made it impossible for you ever to have passed successfully the trial of the last day, or to have escaped the curse which is pronounced upon all who continue not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. And then, in his helplessness as I have depicted it, the malefactor is a type of every believer. You were never placed in a position of such literal impotency as that in

which he is exhibited to us. And yet so far as concerns anything you could do to compensate for the wrong done to God by your sin, to satisfy the claims of justice, to acquire a righteousness which would fulfill the demands of the law, or to renovate and make worthy your nature for companionship with God, you were just as impotent as he; you were just as strictly shut up to an appeal to the divine mercy of every hope of salvation, as he was. This is the view of your case, as it is plainly described in the Scriptures, and as it has been revealed to you a thousand times over by your own experience. You have felt that heaven was just as inaccessible to you, on the ground of any work of your own, as it was to the thief fastened to his cross. These are convictions which have been as clearly revealed to your minds as they were to his.

And then, you may learn from the malefactor's case, to, what you are indebted, for your hope of salvation. A pitying God has spoken to you, you trust, the words of pardon; but, ah, how has he spoken them? Through whose lips? Through those of that sinless man, who suffered and died on the cross. The accents that gave you peace, that this day assure you of God's favor and of his purpose to save you, came from those lips which were parched and blanched, which groaned and prayed on Calvary. The death of Jesus stands as directly connected with your salvation as it did with that of the thief. From out that mortal agony that wrung the life from Jesus, flows the joy that cheers your heart. From the bosom of that dark cloud that fell upon his soul, when he complained that the Father had forsaken him, comes the ray that has kindled the light of life in yours. The death of Christ was endured for you. It was the expiation of your sins; and upon the ground of that alone, it is that the mercy of God has found a way to reach you and embrace you in its gracious promises.

Without those sufferings of Jesus you never could have been saved.

And then in the last place, what shall I say of the extent to which the mercy of God in Christ is represented here, as reaching? What but this, that the chief of sinners may trust it. You Christians may trust it, for unbelief and doubt sometimes shake even your confidence. If you are troubled with misgivings and fears, to-day, behold the abounding grace of God. Remember that it is by grace that you are saved; and behold here, what that grace has done, and learn from this what it can do. Just credit it. Let every vestige of self-righteousness, which keeps you trembling and alarmed on the score of your own unworthiness, be swept out of view to-day; and let the grace of God, for once, in all its plenitude, encompass you, and lift you above all fear into the calm empyrean where the pure sunshine of divine love floats around the very portals of heaven. And you, who are not Christians, what can I say to you on this topic, but that if you are not saved it is not because there is not mercy enough in God or because he has not given you encouragement enough to seek that mercy. Through mercy, and through mercy as it is offered to you in the Gospel, you must be saved, if you are ever saved; but with this spectacle of this thief saved through that mercy, who of you need despair of finding it? It can reach to every one of you, who will seek it. Nothing stands in the way of your own salvation but your own unwillingness to be saved. Only take such an attitude before God, as this malefactor did; only have his penitence, his faith, and his earnestness; only press your suit for mercy as honestly and intelligently, as he did; only make Jesus your mediator, and fix your trust upon him, as he did, and to every one of you the same blessings that he found, and the same assurance of being with Christ in Paradise which cheered his heart, shall infallibly be given.

THE SHEPHERDS' TENTS.

JANUARY 15, 1871.

"Oh, thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids besides the Shepherds' tents."—SONG OF SOL. 1:18.

IN the symbolism of the poem from which this passage is taken, two parties, Christ and the believer, are portrayed under the form of a royal Bridegroom and his Bride. This Bride, in coming into the new relationship to which she has been elevated, is oppressed with that feeling of diffidence, which a remembrance of her lowly origin, and her previous unworthy associations, naturally inspires. Instead of asserting her fitness to occupy the distinguished position to which she has been called, she seems to shrink from it, as one who distrusts her own capacity to bear herself becomingly with the great grace bestowed upon her; and who fears lest by her weakness or inadvertance she may forfeit that grace. In language which bears a noticeable similarity to that of the Prodigal in the Savior's Parable, who cries, "Father, I am not worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants," she confesses, "Bride, though I am, and permitted to sit by the side of the King, I feel that my proper place is at his feet. I feel that the form in which my necessities make his favor towards me most requisite and grateful, is, that, of protection, support and guidance." And so at the same moment in which she avails herself of her privilege to call him "O, thou whom my soul loveth," she is moved to ask

from him the further privilege of becoming a sheep of his flock. This is the import of her inquiry, "where feedest thou? where makest thou thy flock to rest at noon?" an inquiry which has in it all the force of a petition that she might be fed and taken under his charge, as a member of his flock. Every Christian who hears me will be able, I imagine, to recall as a part of his early experience, a feeling analogous to this diffidence of the Bride. The great event of his conversion, when Faith wedded his soul to Christ and Christ appeared taking his soul into union with himself, is called in Scripture the act of his espousals to God. You who have been parties to such an act will remember how overpowering was the impression of the change which it wrought in you. You felt yourselves translated from darkness into light. You were conscious of a transformation like that of one who had been raised from the dead. You could say things of yourself which you were sure were true, which previously you could neither have believed possible, nor understood. Old things had passed away, behold, all things had become new. A new language was on your tongue. A new spirit had been put into your heart. A new and living way of access to God had been opened to you. You were sitting, indeed, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. But just as overpowering as was the impression of the marvelous change you had undergone, was the conviction of your own inadequacy to personate and realize the character in which you now appeared. Bearing a name as exalted as that of the Bride of Christ, you felt that the place which it became you to fill, was rather that of a sheep of his fold. Presumption, and complacency and self-confidence were the last feelings that you would have thought of entertaining. You never were more humble than in that moment when your investiture with all the privileges of the sons of God was made known to you.

The greatness of the grace conferred upon you made you see how completely you were thrown upon grace, for the ability to meet the obligations which the grace already bestowed had created. The good work begun in you was so good that only he who had begun it, could be depended on to carry it on to perfection. And the desire which was uppermost in your hearts, was that Christ, who had revealed himself to you as the Divine Bridegroom, would condescend to perform to you the offices of a Divine Shepherd.

The counsel contained in our text is simply his response to this desire. Stripping the passage of its figurative guise, it is the direction given by Christ to the believer, asking to be placed in a position most favorable for the attaining of that security in his walk, and that development in his character which his new affection as a believer constrains him to seek. I propose to make it my business this morning to unfold the meaning of the last clause of it—"and feed thy kids beside the Shepherds' tents."

This expression, you will observe, consists of two specifications—one of the work to be done, "feed thy kids," and another of the place wherein that work is to be done, "beside the Shepherds' tents." And beginning our examination with this latter particular, we notice this feature in the field or territory occupied by the Sheep of Christ, that it is sub-divided into a number of departments. The spectacle presented to us is not that of a uniform and unbroken plain, but that of a plain dotted all over with shepherds tents, which shepherds' tents become central points in the scene and mark off a whole area into minor circles. As many as are these shepherds' tents, are the bands or companies into which the sheep are gathered; for it is beside these, you notice, that they are directed to feed. Each tent becomes, therefore, a nucleus around which a separate

community is concentrated. Now something of that order which the Lord has instituted among his followers, seems to be indicated by this fact. If the typology of our text gives us any light upon this subject, as I think it does, it teaches us these three things:

First, that the idea of a unity in the Church of Christ is verified or realized in the common relation of all the members to Christ, as his followers, and in the character which is implied in this relation. Every believer belongs to Christ. Every Christian is Christ's man. Every believer or Christian, therefore, in this respect, stands upon the same ground. He is like, or he agrees with every other believer or Christian. You may go from land to land, from population to population and from family to family, and wherever you find a true believer or Christian, you will find an individual sustaining the same relation to Christ, and as a consequence, exhibiting the same type of character. This is enough to warrant us in saying of the Church, it is a Catholic body; and of the sheep of Christ, they are "one fold." The true ground and the adequate ground upon which the unity of the Church stands, is the Headship and the Proprietorship of Christ. Over the whole assemblage of his flock, gathered as they are in their parts around the various shepherds' tents which have been erected among them, and stretching away in their ramifications to every quarter of the horizon, He looks down from His throne in Heaven and recognizes them all as his own. "I know my sheep," he says, "and I am known of mine." And so in the fact that they are all his, he beholds the fulfillment of his prayer for them recorded by St. John, "that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."

Secondly, while unity in this sense, is undoubtedly, a feature essential to the Church, it is maintained in it, under

a great variety of outward forms. While the flock of Christ is constituted into one homogeneous mass by the bond which attaches every member to him, it is separated into an indefinite number of sections by the presence of a plurality of shepherds' tents interspersed through it, and the bond which attaches a portion of the members to each one of these tents. As you look at the picture set before you, in the text, you see evidently one object, the flock of Christ. But you see just as clearly, every here and there, lifting their tapering outlines above the surface of the moving mass of sheep, these shepherds' tents. And each one is the centre of a special flock, which feeds beside it. Each one marks a distinction so far, at least, as locality and organization are concerned, between the flock contiguous to it, and the other flocks which are similarly congregated around other tents. If this picture represents the Church, we must look for a corresponding distinction in the Church. We are to expect to see the one body of Christian followers cut up into minor bodies, by certain great lines of demarcation. And this arrangement will accord exactly with that economy under which the human race has been placed. The earth which men inhabit like a building divided into a number of apartments, shows that it was intended to be occupied by a number of families. The natural barriers which over-run it and fence it in, such as mountains, deserts and seas, have forced its inhabitants to crystalize into separate nations. Then diversity of language has mysteriously supervened to make their severance more complete. And lastly the conflicts of interest, and the caprices of taste, and temperament have operated to widen and perpetuate the breaches which sunder them. The world presents us evidently and necessarily, we may say, with the spectacle of a vast congeries of flocks, clustering, each one, about a shepherd's tent, or a centre of union, of its own.

It is not likely that the plan upon which the Church is constructed, would over-ride this economy which we see established in the world. An ecclesiastical union which would extinguish those distinctions which parcel out the human race, into nations and tongues, would seem to be fatal to the very intentions of Providence. It is far more reasonable, therefore, and I may add, it is far more scriptural, to conclude that while the Church is one body in virtue of the relations of all its parts to Christ, it is constituted of parts, or divided into sections, just as the population of the world is; and upon the same grounds of expediency which have led to the partition of the population of the world. We are no more to look for a visible universal empire in the Church than we are in the world, and that captivating argument by which the advocates of the Romanish Church sustain its pretensions, that in it, this idea of a visible universal empire is realized, is nothing more, therefore, than a splendid sophism, because the promises upon which it is built, are unsound. The ends for which the kingdom of God were instituted, do not require such an empire. Its existence would really be subversive of the ends of Providence, while on the other hand these ends and their analogy with the ends of Providence, do require that the membership of this kingdom, like the membership of the human race, should be separated into a multiplicity of flocks, each one concentrated about its shepherd's tent.

Then thirdly, we notice an absolute parity among the shepherds' tents, exhibited to us in the picture of the text. Amongst the many revealed to us, there is no particular one which overtops the rest; no one which stands up in royal pre-eminence over its fellows, as Joseph's sheaf did, in his dream, over the sheaves of his brethren. Each tent is a centre to the special flock which clusters around it, and feeds under the shadow of it, but no tent is a centre

to all other tents. There is no one over which floats the symbol of supremacy, and which has the right to say: "I am the Mother of you all;" no one whose occupant is entitled to claim the rank and office of a chief shepherd or bishop. No, my friends, you find nothing which symbolizes a human Headship in the Church of Christ, in the spectacle of it which you see here, nothing which gives a particle of countenance to the idea that there is a Primacy, or an Apostolical Hierarchy, in the House of God, by maintaining a connection with which only, you can make good your claim to be numbered among the sheep of Christ. Such language as comes to us every now and then, from certain quarters, finds no parallel in that which the Bridegroom here addresses to his Bride. "Feed," he says, "beside the Shepherds' tents," not beside this one, or that one—not beside Rome, or Oxford, or Geneva, but anywhere, where the pasture you get, is the pure doctrine of Christ, and the regimen you are subjected to, keeps you in fellowship with the rest of his flock, and in union with Him, the common Head of all. The fact that he shows us thus in the territory occupied by his Church, a number of shepherds' tents, and that no one of these bears any sign of precedence over the residue, is a clear intimation that the inmates of these tents, or shepherds, whom he has set over his flock, are equal in authority; and that the parity which prevailed among the Apostles, whom he originally sent forth, was intended to be perpetual among those who were to succeed them, as the Pastors or Bishops of his Church. "Call no man your Father upon earth," he said to these Apostles, "for one is your Father which is in Heaven. Neither be ye called Masters, for one is your Master even Christ;" and in precise accordance with this injunction, by the similitude employed by the Holy Ghost in the text, we are taught as a permanent ordinance in his kingdom, his min-

isters are brethren, installed as peers in their separate shepherds' tents, with no Fathers or Masters among them.

But not to dwell too long upon these incidental matters, what it concerns us more to notice in the counsel, "feed beside the shepherds' tents," is that the welfare and advancement of the sheep of Christ, are here represented, as depending upon the use they make of the ministrations of the shepherds, whom the Lord has appointed over his flock. There is something significant in the turn which is given in the Bridegroom's answer to the thought which had been expressed in the request of the Bride. She had asked, "where feedest thou?" that is, where dost thou administer food to thy sheep? She was thinking only of him, and the aim of her inquiry was to learn how the benefits of his personal culture could be obtained. He replies by pointing her to the shepherds' tents; and directing her to feed beside them. As much as to tell her, "I execute my office as guardian of my flock through the agency of a set of under-shepherds. What you seek from me I give you through their hands. I have commissioned them to be the feeders of my sheep; and lo, I am with them alway, even unto the end of the world." This interpretation of the Bridegroom's response, leads us to the conclusion that the existence of a pastoral office, or of a body of men devoted to the work of teaching and ruling in the Church, is a divine institution, and is to be taken as an index of the grace and bounty of the great head of the Church. It is his method of providing for the safety, comfort and the edification of his people. The Christian ministry is more than a learned or philanthropic profession. It is almost a profane misnomer, to speak of it as a business, by which men undertake to achieve renown or win a livelihood. It is an ordinance of God, in the same sense in which the Church is. "No man taketh this honor unto himself but

he that is called of God, as was Aaron." As your eye looks over this tract of ground occupied by this concourse of sheep, presented to you in the imagery of the text, and notices the shepherds' tents stationed at convenient points all over the field, you do not have a doubt that it was by the special order of the proprietor of the flock, that these tents were placed there; and that it is by his special appointment that the inmates of them are discharging their office. And no more can you have a doubt that the ministry which you find allied to the Church has been created and put in exercise in the Church, by the same authority as that which has instituted the Church. The ministry is a phenomenon of the same character with the Church. If that is God's building, so is this. Hence the Apostles speak of being "Ambassadors of Christ," and "workers together with God." Hence St. Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians, that the Lord had given to the Church, "some Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists, some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the deifying of the body Christ," and in the same way he reminds the Bishops of these same Ephesian Christians in his interview with them at Miletus, of their duty to "take heed unto themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he had purchased with his own blood." From the origin of the flock, we have no difficulty in determining the origin of the shepherds, whose work it is to oversee and feed it. The same supernatural power which we have reason to believe is engaged in gathering out of the generations of men, a peculiar people, known as the "household of faith," is engaged equally in calling, and furnishing, and commissioning a set of men to whom the supervision of that household is ministerially entrusted. That Paul was one of

such a set of men, nobody can question. That he regarded Timothy as another, is just as certain; and that he expected others after Timothy to belong to it we know from his positive injunction in 2nd Ephesians to him, "and the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." In regard to the validity of the grounds upon which any particular individual would authenticate his claim to belong, to that set of men, there may be a diversity of opinion; but in regard to the ordinance by which the existence of such a set of men has been made an organic element in the Church, there can be none. And, hence, to them is delegated the office which primarily and essentially belongs to Christ, himself, of providing for the nurture and protection of the sheep. And hence, you hear Christ saying to the follower who is looking up to him for such nurture and protection, "feed beside the shepherds' tents."

And now the residue of our time must be devoted to an exposition of this work of feeding, which is devolved upon his flock, by the Master's charge. These shepherds' tents, these offices in the house of God, these ordinances of teaching and ruling, all looking to the spiritual training and edification of the Church as the end, obviously lay upon the membership of the Church, an obligation to use them for the end for which they were appointed. The Pastoral function is limited, so to speak, to the indicating and the opening of the ground, where the sheep of Christ may safely and profitably feed. It is not meant to supersede effort on their part. It is rather meant, to stimulate and facilitate effort. It has no power to confer upon the soul of the believer, those graces which it needs to have, in order to verify its high relationship as the Bride of Christ; it can only help it to acquire those graces. It can only

offer it the means and methods by which those graces are to be obtained. The sheep that will not feed beside the shepherd's tent, will get no benefit from its contiguity to that object. It will starve and die beside the shepherd's tent. The provisions for your growth in knowledge and advancement in holiness which are included in the economy of the Church, will do you no good, my friends, unless with an honest craving for such growth and advancement you make a proper use of these provisions. The injunction, "feed beside the shepherds' tents," means just this, that you should make a proper use of these provisions. The Lord Jesus has so ordered it, perhaps, that the enjoyment of his own gracious interest in and care for his people should be conditioned upon their making a proper use of these provisions, in order that the genuineness of the new principle in their hearts by which they call him, "Him whom the souls love," should have an opportunity of attesting itself by their diligence and fidelity in this respect. The sheep who are found feeding most faithfully beside those shepherds' tents, which he has established among them, are undoubtedly the types of the souls who do most truly love him, and who are most sensibly favored with the evidences of his love. And the true explanation of the fact that Christians anywhere are seen to be in a dull, morbid and lifeless condition, would probably be that they have grown indifferent to the value, and lax in the use, of those provisions for their spiritual health and growth, which have been set before them, in the ordinances and ministrations of the Church. And as the spectacle of Christians in this state is not a rare one, it may not be amiss for me to sum up the practical bearings of our text in a few counsels, enforcing this duty of using those gifts and helps which the Lord has ordained for the edification of his people.

And with this aim, let me remind you first, that the real character of the Christian is indicated by the term, "Bride of Christ"—not by the term, "sheep of Christ." The effort of every truly regenerated soul, therefore, is to realize this character; to develop and ripen into the sort of person it ought to be, in order to fill the place of a Bride of Christ. You will have observed how in the text, the party speaking, drops down, as it were, from this level to that designated by the term, "sheep" of Christ; and this only, that she may rise again, in a worthier guise, and with a more assured confidence, to that level. The believer should always remember the high calling he has received from God. The most sacred, the most honorable forms of human kinship are used to describe the relation to his Savior into which he has been introduced. The Apostle seems to exhaust the power of language in this direction, when he says to the Corinthians, "I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ;" and when he says to the Ephesians, "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones." Such nearness to the Lord, as is proposed to us in these terms, seems to bewilder us. The splendor of the elevation to which they lift us is dazzling; and with blinded eyes we turn away from it. The foot of faith trembles to mount to this altitude of grace. And though somehow the heart admits and feels the bridal bond which unites us to Christ, the lip fears to claim the bridal name; and with an overpowering sense of unworthiness and timidity, we ask to be ranked among his "sheep." It befits us better, we feel, to be tended and fed by Jesus, the shepherd, than crowned and feasted by Jesus, the Bridegroom. And so it does, brethren. We need, as the speaker in the text does, to drop down from this level to which we have been raised by our union with Christ, by our "acceptance in the Be-

loved," to the lower one of an object of Christ's pastoral guardianship and nurture. Our infirmities admonish us, that in our present state the place of the sheep is safer for us than the place of the Bride. But then, and this is what I would have you bear in mind, your relation to Christ is not changed by this change of place. You are his Bride, all the time, that you are acting in the humbler capacity of his sheep. The offices he bestows upon you in this latter character are only in order to qualify you to assume and exemplify the better, the former one. The idea which lay in the mind of God, in giving you to his Son, requires that you should be his Bride—not his sheep. The sheep holds the position of the property of its owner, and excites on the part of the owner such a regard as belongs to property. The sheep by force of an instinctive sense of helplessness clings to the Shepherd and mechanically follows him. The believer occupies immeasurably higher ground than this in his relation to Christ. He belongs to Christ it is true, for he has been "bought with a price"—but not as property. He has been bought with an outlay of which the prompting motive was Love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." And the regard he receives from the Redeemer, is that which the Bridegroom bestows upon his Bride; and the attachment and the service which this Redeemer expects from his followers, is not the irrational submission and dependence of an animal, but the free and joyful consecration of a loving Bride. I say it becomes you to have this fact always in remembrance. Because you stand now in the position of a sheep of Christ, and are embraced by that economy which has been instituted over his flock, do not forget that this condition of things is only subordinate to the forming and perfecting within you of the elements of that higher character which is described by the term the

Bride of Christ. You must follow Jesus in your religion, not in that blind and formal way in which the sheep confides in the Mastership of the Shepherd; but in the way the true wife blends her own being with that of the husband whom she loves. O, these sheep that are so composedly ranging about the pasture grounds and treading the pathways of Church systems and formulas, without even feeling the pulsations of a life which weds them to Christ, and keeps the soul growing into tenderer and closer union with him every day and every hour, I fear they are entitled to bear the name neither of sheep nor of Bride! For Christ, I am sure recognizes no one as his sheep, who is not drawn to him and drawn after him, by the force of an affection as direct and personal as that which leads the Bride to forsake father and mother and cleave unto the Bridegroom!

It follows in the next place from this fact that the result aimed at in every believer's calling is the realizing of this character of the Bride of Christ; that the predominant desire in such a believer's heart ought to be that of acquiring the graces of which this character is composed. Such a desire is often alluded to in the scripture as a characteristic of the spiritual or regenerated man. It is spoken of as something as well-defined as a bodily appetite; as when our Savior says, "blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled;" or St. Peter writes, "as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby." This desire is recognized in the direction given in our text, "feed beside the shepherds' tents." It lies at the bottom, of course, of a compliance with this direction. There will be no feeding where there is no desire for food. The right-minded Christian will feel, as a part of his new nature, the working of a force analogous to that of a bodily appetite, impelling

him to seek those things which minister nourishment to his spiritual life, or as the Apostle expresses it, which have a tendency to form and mould him "into a perfect man, into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." As the Bride adorneth herself with her jewels, so will the sacred instincts of his heart prompt him to the use of those means by which he shall acquire the comeliness befitting the Bride of Christ. The command which assigns to him the work of feeding will have been anticipated by a desire for food already lodged in his own soul; for, as the consciousness of the relation he sustains to his divine Bridegroom must evince itself by a disposition to grow into a fitness for this relation, and as growing is dependent upon feeding as its condition, it is as impossible for him to intermit the work of feeding, as it is to repudiate his relation to Christ. It is a good way of testing, therefore, brethren the temper and the drift of any believer's heart, to mark the vigor of this desire in his heart after the food which Christ has provided for his flock; and to note the measure of his alacrity in feeding beside the shepherds' tents.

My second counsel to you, therefore, is to be careful to maintain in your hearts a healthful appetite and relish for those ordinances and aids by which the ideal set before you in your calling to be the Bride of Christ, is to be realized. If those be wanting, the best outward provision in the world cannot keep you from leanness and sickness.

And then, a third counsel, obviously will be to attend actually to this work of feeding. The shepherds' tents are before you, indicating, not as some Christians seem to suppose, that these tents are a guaranty that everything which is implied in your salvation is secured to you, and that the shepherds' work absolves you from all obligations to work; no, not this, but indicating simply these quite different facts, that here is a vital work to be done by you; and

here, a place where without delay or intermission, it may be done. Beside these shepherds' tents you are to feed. The facilities for your growth and edification are as numerous, and as near to you as these sanctuaries and their ministrations, these Sabbaths and their privileges, these social assemblies of the week with their prayers, and their instructions, these living teachings of the pulpit, and these legacies of wisdom and piety bequeathed to you in the witness of the good men of former ages, these pages of inspiration which God's own hand has prepared for you, and these closets which Jesus has commended to you as store-houses of all those blessings contained in the promises to prayer; and you feed beside them when you are living in the constant and faithful use of them. And the amount of your feeding will be in proportion to the use you make of them. Your feeding will stop when you cease to make use of them. It is just here, in this locality that Christ has commanded his sheep to feed; and you forfeit your right to be called his sheep, and you divorce yourselves from the benefit of that nurture which he bestows upon his sheep, whenever you are not found feeding in this pasture-ground. And it is just here, from these fields, which encircle the shepherds' tents, that he is gathering the material of that Church which he is to crown in Heaven as the "Bride, the Lamb's wife." And if you are not known as the tenant of these fields on earth, O, my friends, it is not likely that over you the nuptial song of Heaven will ever be sung, "let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready."

And then one counsel more, must not be overlooked. I have thus far spoken of this feeding by Christ's sheep as a work having reference to their own nourishment only. This sense I consider clearly implied in the expression of the text. But you will notice that that expression, in the form of it,

represents this feeding as a work which terminates also upon others. "Feed thy kids," is the precise term of the charge delivered by the Bridegroom to the Bride, "feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." That is, "couple with the effort to secure spiritual nurture for your own soul, an effort to supply with this nurture the souls of others. When thou feedest see to it, that the 'kids' and lambs, and young ones over whom God has made thee the household overseer, feed also." It would seem from this very extraordinary form in which the answer to the Bride's request for the privilege of being placed under her Lord's supervision and care, is presented, that the Holy Spirit meant to teach that the direct way to promote piety, and acquire the advantages of religion in ourselves, is to be engaged in trying to qualify others, especially our own offspring, to become members of the flock of Christ. It is too late for me to say much upon the important subject which this view of our text opens to us, the fact that the bestowing of labor upon the religious culture of our children, operates as a means of grace to the parent. But I may briefly say, that such a fact accords with the general Scripture principle, that it is he who watereth, who may expect to be watered, and he who occupies himself with giving who may expect to receive. And I may propound the question to you, brethren, whether the explanation of the fact that the stock of bridal graces which every believing soul is assumed to be accumulating, is in the case of many of us, so small to-day, may not be just this, that whatever feeding we may have done ourselves, we have neglected too much to become feeders of the little flocks whom we preside over in our homes? The priesthood of the parent and the evangelism of the fireside, these are the very truths wrapped up in the significance of infant baptism; and if they are dropped it had better be abandoned. It is to be feared that these modern

generations are losing their sense of the obligation and the value of the ordinances; and I shall probably make a confession, to which many of you will subscribe when I say, that if our Fathers and Mothers, in their day, had not been more dutiful in feeding their kids beside the shepherds' tents, than we have been in feeding ours, we should have been as barren of the faith of a Christian, and as far from the kingdom of God, in our grown-up manhood, as our children so generally seem to be in their youth. I am sure there is a great fault in the Church everywhere, in this respect. Religion is dying out in our homes; and if it dies out there, it is hardly too much to say it will die out everywhere. Brethren, the soul that Christ espouses to Himself ought to be a soul consumed with love to him; a soul that can look up to him and say as Peter did, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love Thee." And now, mark the evidence of this love, this Bride's troth which Christ demanded of Peter—"feed my sheep, feed my lambs." And remember that he demands the same of you!



THE WALK TO EMMAUS.

(SACRAMENTAL.)

DECEMBER 23, 1855.

“And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?”—LUKE 24:32.

WE have here presented to us first the statement of an effect, and second the statement of its cause. The effect was the burning of the hearts of the disciples, the cause was the discourse of Jesus by the way, in which he opened to them the Scriptures. The language employed to describe the effect is metaphorical; but very intelligible and very expressive. The heart is said to burn when a person is excited by any strong emotion or passion. A word may effect the hearer as the coal of fire does the wood; and even sometimes as the spark does the magazine of powder to which it is applied. It may change his condition from one of apathy to one of intense sensibility. It may rouse him from a posture of passive repose to one of violent or explosive activity. Some such effect as this the language of Jesus had, on this occasion, upon the minds of the disciples. They were dull and cold, dejected and stupefied before, as is apt to be the case after the experience of any sudden shock or any severe calamity. They became conscious, under the power of their companions' conversation, of a revival of feeling and interest. Their torpid faculties were warmed into motion. Tender memo-

ries, inspiring hopes, vivid convictions, ardent desires, cheering consolations were infused into them until they glowed and sparkled, so to speak, with the blaze of fervid thoughts and sentiments, which had been kindled within them. The cause, which produced this effect, is made entirely evident to us by connecting the statement of the text with the 27th verse of the Chapter. The text says it was what Jesus said, while he talked with them by the way, and while he opened to them the Scriptures. The 27th verse says, that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures their things concerning himself." The theme of that discourse which made their hearts so burn within them, therefore, was the portrait and history which revelation had given of himself. This was the subject about which he talked with them; this the point, in reference to which he opened to them the Scriptures. Turning their minds away from the impressions and conceptions which the scenes they had recently witnessed had created, he directed them to those which the predictions of the inspired books suggested. He made them look at Christ through the telescope of faith instead of the organs of sense, and the speculation of reason. He changed their point of view. He took them, in a figure, as he had once taken literally, three of their companions to a high mountain apart and there was transfigured before them. He showed himself to them by a demonstration of the Spirit, and not through the perceptions of the flesh. They saw from the view of him, which they had now obtained, what the true office and the true glory of the Messiah were; and they saw how all the humiliations to which their Master had been subjected—how even the cross and the tomb, consisted with, and fulfilled that office and that glory. They felt, under the luminous exposition of the Divine oracles which He gave them, how justly their previous

dullness had merited the rebuke, "O, fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," and they assented with a joyful conviction to the conclusion, couched in the question, "ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?"

The cause of that peculiar excitement of mind of which they were conscious may be said, therefore, to have been, the believing apprehension of the character and work of their Lord; and the fact recorded in the text may be taken as an illustration of the kind of feeling which every Christian ought to experience, when engaged in the contemplation of his Savior. The same cause may be expected to produce the same effect. In the same situation, every disciple may be expected to feel as these ancient disciples did. And here in the connection between such a position as this and such mental exercise as this, I lay the foundation of that series of reflections which I propose to offer to you, this morning. The Christian contemplating his Savior—what is that, brethren, but the very act and spectacle, exemplified by the business in which each of you are engaged in your visit to the house of God to-day? The ordinance we have met to celebrate, is specifically, an exhibition and a commemoration of Christ. The same mysterious treasure, the same inspiring secret which Jesus exposed when he unlocked the Scriptures by his interpretation, is enfolded in the significance of these sacramental rites which we have come to observe. They are expositors of the same great truths of which Moses and the prophets wrote. As we penetrate their design and look through them to the end, we shall find our minds in contact with the very image which so transported and fired the hearts of the disciples. For they are meant, pre-eminently, to show us Christ—to set him forth evidently as crucified amongst us—to make us think of him, and to give us strong and affecting concep-

tions of his character and work. "Do this in remembrance of me," was his own command; and "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death, till he come," is the declaration of an Apostle. Your participation in this ordinance then would fail entirely of its object if it did not lead you into a peculiarly intimate contemplation of your Savior. It will be an empty ceremonial if it does not introduce you to the same vision, as that which met the disciples on their way to Emmaus. Here by the way, in which you are going—here stepping calmly athwart your life's track—here breaking in upon the crowd and the tumult of your ordinary thoughts and engagements, comes an expounder to arrest your steps and claim your ear. It is not Jesus, but it is a witness sent by Jesus; a minister appearing in his name, and commissioned by his authority; and its errand is the same as that which brought Jesus to the disciples on their way to Emmaus. It has come to open to you the Scriptures; to unfold to you the mysteries of Redemption; and to paint before your minds in a living picture, the grace and glory of the great Redeemer. The same story exactly, as that which Jesus told to his rapt listeners and which made them exclaim, "did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us," this expounder will tell you; and if you listen to its revelations and catch the import of its wondrous recital, the same result will follow, and your hearts will burn within you too.

The Christ of the Scriptures, brethren, is my text, and the proper theme of your meditations to-day. And the first feature in it which I shall propose for your consideration is his person. Who is it that the Scriptures introduce to you under the name of Christ? This name let it be remembered is the name of an office. It is something, or it describes something, which he who hears it has assumed or under-

taken. It does not properly inform us who the person is who hears it. It leaves the way open for an inquiry into this point; and it suggests the inquiry as a natural and a pertinent one. There is a history concerning Christ which lies apart from the history of his office as the Messiah. We may ask who it was that assumed that office just as we may ask who Aaron was, that assumed the office of priest, or David was, that assumed the office of king, or Samuel was, that assumed the office of prophet. Aaron and David and Samuel, each had a history as a person apart from his history as an official character; and so, he who is presented to us in the Scriptures, as the Christ, has a history, as a person which may be considered apart from his history, in the character which he bore as the Christ. This history, the believer contemplating his Savior, cannot fail to notice, and he may find in it enough to excite within his breast the warmest fervors of delight and devotion. For he will have pursued his inquiries but a little way, before he will find himself gazing upon all that is sublime, and all that is adorable in Divinity. All that is comprised in the idea of God, will be found to be represented in Scripture, as contained in the personality of Christ. As line after line and feature after feature of the portrait evolves itself to his view upon the page of inspiration, he will have (unless his eye yields to the distorting violence of prejudice, or he arbitrarily refuses to put confidence in the organs and functions of his nature), to confess, "this is the very God," "this is the identical brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." Thus Christ appears to us, invested with the eternity of God. He existed before he was born into the world, he existed from everlasting. Thus he says he came into the world, he came down from Heaven, he was sent forth by the Father. "Before Abraham was" he says "I am." "In the beginning," writes St.

John, "was the word," already existing, that is, when creation began, or prior to the existence of all creatures he had a being, a being that was uncreated, and hence the being of the self-existent and eternal essence, which is God. And hence, when about closing his residence on earth, he prays, "that the Father would glorify him with his own self with the glory which he had with him before the world was." Before the world was, away back in the dim forever that preceded the dawn of time, he appears, living and rejoicing in the fellowship of Jehovah's glory. According to the Scriptures there is no period when it could have said of him, he was not, or he began to be. And so he possesses the omnipotence of God. "All things were made by him," and without him was not anything made that was made." "By him all things consist." "He is able to subdue all things unto himself." "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth even so the son quickeneth whom he will." "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Now who is he I ask, of whom such things are affirmed, but the Almighty God? Further he has the omnipotence of God. Nathanael, hidden in his retreat under the fig tree, and the disciples, in the middle of the sea, in the darkness of a stormy night, were present to his eye. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," and "I am with you always even unto the end of the world," are his promises. And in the same way the Scriptures ascribe to him the omniscience of God. He knows the thoughts of the hearts of men, he needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man. "In him are hid all the treasures, and wisdom, and knowledge." "Lord thou knowest all things," was Peter's confession concerning him. And in virtue of this knowledge alone it is, that he is qualified to perform that office of judging the world at the last day,

which it is again and again affirmed, has been entrusted to him. In connection with these attributes, which establish his divinity, the Scriptures ascribe to him acts and works which require divinity in the operator. The creation of the universe is said to have been his act. The administration of providence is repeatedly said to be his work. He makes angels his ministers, he hears the prayers of those who call on his name, he is to raise the dead and try every man according to the deeds done in the body, and to separate infallibly between the righteous and the wicked, at his second coming. And then as conclusive evidence on the point, we find him in repeated instances, bearing the titles and claiming, and receiving, the honor and worship which are due only to God. "The word," says St. John, "was with God, and the word was God," and again in his first Epistles "this is the true God and eternal life." "Of whom"—that is the fathers—writes St. Paul, "as concerning the flesh, Christ came who is over all, God blessed forever." "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," he said of himself, and, "I and my Father are one." "All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father." Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God. "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Such is the testimony which the Scriptures give us, of the person of Christ. This is the vision that the opened volume of inspiration presents to the mind of the believer, contemplating his Savior; and if it had not the vision of God, I know not where that vision is to be found. Christ must be divine; or profane hands have been laid upon the regalia of heaven's majesty to deck a creature in; and heaven's own ambassadors have played the trick to steal from their

mighty liege the homage of his subjects, and lay it at the feet of a presuming and sacriligious rival. The Scriptures surely never meant to do us such a wrong—to beguile us into such a fearful error. O, no! They would never, never, have made Christ to look so like God, if they had not intended to make us acknowledge him as God. This is the first truth which demands our attention as we contemplate him.

And now, the next presents him to us, as assuming in connection with his Divinity, the nature of man. This was in order to qualify him for that office and work which he performs in his character as the Christ. God, to become our Savior, became man. Thus he is represented as saying when he came into the world, “a body hast thou prepared me.” Thus the prophet Isaiah declares in anticipation of his advent, “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,” and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful counsellor and mighty God, and everlasting Father, the prince of peace.” Thus his apostles write, “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” “God was manifest in the flesh.” “He made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” “When the fullness of time was come God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem* them which were under the law.” These expressions teach most unequivocally the fact that this divine person, adopted into union with his divinity, a perfect human nature, and did so, that he might be qualified to perform such acts, as were implied in the work he had undertaken to execute as the Christ. He became one with man, that he might in man's behalf do those things which man was required to do, in order to be one with God. Such an assimilation of himself to those, for whose benefit he assumed the office of

Christ, was fit and necessary according to the scheme, under which his mission had been created. So the Scripture often affirms, "For as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood," they say, "he also himself took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage," and again, "wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." These are the developments of Scripture, concerning the person of Christ. They are confessedly startling and astounding. They show us in the man a God, and in the God, a man. We see the facts. They are verities, made certain by revelation; and set before us with a precision and fullness of language which forbid all reasonable doubt as to their character. We can receive them as facts, but they are mysteries, which as to the mode of subsistence or process of construction must ever baffle our conceptions. They are like palaces of glistening marble, lifting themselves clear and gorgeous in the morning sunlight upon the peaks of a mountain, around whose broad bulk the mists of the valley are wreathing their impervious veil. We see the palaces, but that which supports them we do not see. We know they are standing there, but how they stand is concealed from view. They seem to us to be hanging in the clouds, or floating in the azure heaven. But we are sure they are real palaces, and we never doubt that they have a real and an adequate basis, though a temporary obstruction has made us incapable of discovering it. And so we can believe these mysterious disclosures of Scripture concerning the person of Christ, to be truths, having in them every condition and element of verity, and harmoniz-

ing legitimately with all other truths, although we cannot travel up, so to speak, to the height of them, by any visible path of philosophical demonstrations, or trace out palpably the lines and points by which their connection with the order of things, or the universe of truth, is established. And Christians do believe them everywhere; and find them, notwithstanding all their mysteriousness, so potent in their influence over them that their hearts may be said often to burn within them, while they contemplate them.

We come now to the next feature in the exhibition of Christ presented in the Scriptures, and that is the work which he performed after his assumption of humanity. This we have described to us in the narrative of his ministry upon earth. He speaks of it often himself in such phrases as these, "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The prophet foretold it, when he wrote of him such things as these, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." His apostles represented it in such passages as these, "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead

to sins should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," "for he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." From these Scriptural quotations, which might be multiplied to almost any extent, we may learn what was the character and what the object of Christ's work on earth. It was to redeem those who were under the curse of the law, and it was to endure suffering and death, as the means of their redemption. The believer contemplating his Savior, sees him undergoing this fearful process for this benevolent end. From those heights of glory, where he caught his first glimpse of Christ, he must come down to those lowly scenes, where Jesus, "the man of sorrows," appears, treading his pathway of pain and poverty and scorn. It is a sad story, that he has to read here; a story written in tears and in blood. Bethlehem, where he lay in his manger-cradle, Nazareth, where the infuriated crowd sought to cast him headlong from the brow of a hill, Sychar, where he sat at noontide on Jacob's Well, wearied with his journey, Bethany, where he wept at the grave of Lazareth, Gethsemane, where he endured that strange agony which wrung the crimson sweat from his frame, Jerusalem, where he was condemned, and mocked, and scourged, and crowned with thorns, and Calvary, where, amidst the tortures of a cross, the companion of thieves, and the object of the scoffs and anathemas of a fiendish mob, he bowed his head and died—must all pass in review before him. The history of Christ's sojourn on earth is a protracted exhibition of suffering and humiliation. It is a history which, without aiming at pathos in a single paragraph or word, is superlatively pathetic in every part. It is a history which draws the warm tear-drops from the eye of childhood, and kindles the flame

of sensibility in the cold breast of palsied age. It is a history, which no honest or thoughtful believer can explore without feeling his heart burn within him as intensely as the disciples' did when Jesus expounded to them the things of the Scriptures concerning himself. This history is the inspired description of the work of redemption. It is God's record of what was done, in order to redeem each particular soul of man. As Paul does not hesitate to entitle it, it is the narrative of God's purchasing his church, with his own blood. It shows us a preparatory work which the Christ had to perform, in undertaking to become the Savior of sinners; and it enters largely into that field of observation which the believer has to survey, when he would contemplate his Savior. It is what you, my brethren, must look at to-day. That plaintive voice which summons you to the Sacramental table with the words, "do this in remembrance of me," assumes a yet deeper plaintiveness as it says to you over the elements of the feast, "this is my body broken for you." "this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." What the body and the blood represent, the concentrated woes of the cross in which the lifelong sorrow of Christ attained its culmination, must all be present to your minds, as you perform your part in the ceremonial of this ordinance, and if you see but the half of what these symbols are adapted to exhibit, your hearts must be harder than the nether millstone, if they do not melt into gushing tenderness, and rise into transports of wonder and gratitude.

But this work of Christ, upon earth, as I have said, is a preparatory work. It lays the foundation for a superstructure to be built upon it. It is in itself but the foundation. It involves in its design, we may say, the superstructure which is to be built upon it, but it does not present us with that superstructure in fact. That appears in

the fruits of redemption, as they are developed in the actual salvation of those to whom the work of Christ's redemption is applied. The application of his work of redemption, to the actual salvation of men, is another part of his office which needs to be taken into view by the believer in his contemplation of his Savior. "He shall see of the travail of his soul," says the prophet, "and shall be satisfied." That is, it is in the birth, the issue of his sacrifice those to whom by his death he gives life, that the Messiah is to find his satisfaction, or to see his work reach its perfect consummation. The foundation which he has laid must complete itself in the superstructure that rises upon it; and this it does as often as any soul, by coming to Christ for the benefits of redemption, becomes engrafted into him, and so is constituted an heir of eternal life. For the accomplishment of this result, he is represented in Scripture, as now prosecuting his ministry in heaven. Thus says the Apostle Peter, "him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior for to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins," and to the same effect Paul declares, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but unto Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." When the believer would contemplate him, therefore, he must follow him to his state of exaltation in heaven, and must recognize his agency in appearing for each one of his followers and in granting to them repentance and the forgiveness of sins. It is thus that he makes in the case of each one of them, the work of redemption which he performed on earth, reach its appropriate and its predestinated issue. His Spirit, his Word, and his Providence, are the instruments which he employs in this ministry, the divine apparatus, so to speak, with which he rears

the superstructure upon the foundation he had planted in the Sacrifice of himself.

And here, at this point, the history of Christ begins to blend with the history of the individual believer. Here the circle of Christ's agency passes into the circle of the Christian's experience. In contemplating the Savior, he now finds himself contemplating *his* Savior, or contemplating Christ engaged in the special work of saving him. In the process by which he has been brought into a state of salvation, he traces the work of Christ, he sees a chapter of his acts, as distinctly as he does in any part of the narrative of what he did when he was upon earth. Just as he sees Christ in the atonement of Calvary, he sees him in the order of events and the series of appliances, by which the benefits of redemption have been brought home to him. Could Paul, think you, have set his mind to a contemplation of the Savior, without seeing him as concerned in bringing about his journey to Damascus, or Cornelius, without seeing him as concerned in bringing about his interview with Peter? or Lydia, without seeing him as concerned in bringing about the meeting by the riverside, at Philippi, where Paul preached to the women? The history of Christ in the case of each one of these persons, ran into, or identified itself with the history of their conversion. It could not be followed out completely, without connecting itself with that. And so Christ is manifested in every believer's conversion. When he would contemplate his Savior, he must, if he does not shut his eyes to a very important and a very interesting department of his subject, contemplate him as present and acting in the history of his own conversion. In this respect he has a vision of Christ which is peculiar to himself. In all that concerns the person of Christ, and his work while on earth, all believers may be said to stand on the same platform, and be engaged in

contemplating the same spectacle. But the moment they come to look at Christ as concerned in the application of redemption, the picture varies, with each separate eye, and each beholder has his own spectacle to consider. Each has been called by Christ and brought to Christ, in his own way. Each has his own answer to give to the question, "why am I what I am," and "how have I been led into the favored position I occupy?" Each has his Savior to contemplate, and it is one and the same Savior with them all; but in the special aspect under which each is called to contemplate his Savior in his dealings with his own soul, each may be said to have a Savior of his own to contemplate. In other words, the history of what Christ has done, for each believer in bringing him into his kingdom and in preparing him for his glory, will constitute a revelation of the Savior, which will be peculiar to him, and which he may contemplate as something belonging exclusively to him. The story of his own spiritual birth and experience, the means and the circumstances connected with his conversion, and his progressive steps in his discovery of truth, the stages in his translation from darkness to light, his trials and his helps, his victories and his defeats, his wanderings and his recoveries, all the struggles and vicissitudes encountered in his way to the refuge which he found at last, in believing in Jesus—will come to be inwoven with the annals of Christ, so that the one cannot be read apart from the other. And in the same way, all the history of the child of God, subsequent to the time of his spiritual birth, all the incidents of his Christian course, all that has befallen him by the way, whether pleasant or painful, whether in the form of indulgence or of chastisement, all that has helped him forward, or kept him from falling back, all that has corrected his errors, or mortified his corruptions, or developed his graces, all come to be resolved into a part

of the manifestation of Christ to his soul. He may see or ought to see his Savior in them all, for they all show the operations of his hand in the completion of the good work he has begun in him. They are all the footprints of the Captain of his salvation, leading him onward to the perfection of his final state.

With this suggestive thought, brethren, I must close my remarks. You can pursue it for yourselves, and nothing can give you a better theme for your reflections. I have pointed out to you a wide range which your meditations upon the Savior may take. It embraces his person, his work on earth in effecting redemption, and his ministry in heaven in applying his redemption to the souls of his people. There are features in it to be looked at by you all in common, so that your hearts may burn together, while you gaze. One Savior, seen by all and the same to all, surely ought to make you realize, in your fraternal sympathy, the communion of the Saints, and produce that proof of your discipleship which your Master demands, "that ye love one another." And there are features in it to be noticed by each one of you separately. Christ has been making a special revelation of himself to each one of you, in all his dealings with you as individuals. Fail not to see him in this! Recognize your Savior's hand in every event! Behold him walking side by side with you in every scene! Hear his voice saying, "it is I," in the wrath of the tempest, no less than in the balmy sunshine! And with hearts burning at the tokens he has given you, of his mercy and his faithfulness, put on record your grateful testimony, with the Psalmist to-day, "Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul!"

MARTHA, THE BUSY HOUSEKEEPER.

JUNE 25, 1853.

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, ‘Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.’”—LUKE 10:41.42.

THE Bible here takes us into the retreats of domestic life. Humble, every-day characters are introduced to our view. The faults and the virtues of two lowly village women are allowed a place in the book of God. This is quite in accordance with the object for which that book professedly was given; a feature in it that belongs necessarily to that office which it undertakes to exercise, as a complete and sufficient guide to man. This is indeed one of the marks of wisdom that prove it to be the offspring of a Divine mind—that it loses sight of none of the circumstances and conditions in which man is called to act; and in which, consequently, he may need instruction. It has something for everybody in every position and relation. It is no book of poetry, dealing with imaginary personages; no book of speculation, legislating for a Utopian world. It was written for men and women, just as we see them every day and everywhere. It is adapted to the case of the housekeeper no less than that of the monarch. It gives rules for regulating the economy of the fireside; no less than the policy of cabinets and courts. Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary, and from what he saw and said

there, as recorded in the sacred narrative, we may gather several hints, which may be applicable to all homes. It becomes us to be diffident in ascribing motives to the Deity; but seeing the use which has been actually made of this incident by introducing it into the Bible, we shall probably be safe in saying that in paying this visit to the sisters of Bethany (or at least in having it recorded), our Lord designed to furnish a general intimation of the faults and dangers and duties which attend domestic life everywhere.

Let us turn aside with him to the humble Judean cottage where he has stopped on his way to Jerusalem, to be refreshed by the hospitality of the pious and affectionate inmates; and guided by his own judgment in the case, let us inquire what there was to be condemned and what approved in the conduct of the two sisters. "Martha, Martha," says Christ to the one, "thou art careful and troubled about many things." This was a mild, but decided rebuke. The Lord saw something—perhaps much—in the disposition which led Martha to be careful and troubled, which he deemed reprehensible. All we know or can divine of this disposition, we must infer from the two simple facts stated in the narrative—that while Jesus sat in her house she was cumbered about much serving—and that in an impatient spirit she came to the Lord complaining of her sister that she had left her to serve alone, and asking him to bid her come and help her. These two simple facts, however, lay the ground for a very fair conjecture that the offence which is rebuked in the text was one, or all of several things which I will proceed to mention.

And first, may not Martha have been influenced on this occasion by a worldly pride—by the ambition of a carnal mind? Christ was her guest, and she seems to have resolved that the very best she could do, the very utmost her skill and means could furnish, should be provided.

She did not stop to inquire what was most agreeable to him—what was most consonant with his tastes and habits and with his purposes in visiting her house. She seized the opportunity afforded by his coming for what, according to her mode of life, would be called a great entertainment. It mattered not that something less would have sufficed for Christ; nothing less would suffice for herself. A little care and trouble might have done for him; it would not do for herself. A few things might have abundantly satisfied his desires; many things must be got ready before she could be satisfied herself. In all this labor and liberality therefore, she was consulting her own pleasure, rather than that of her Lord. She was serving Martha, the lordly mistress, rather than Jesus, the lowly guest. She was aiming at saving herself from mortification, and not her master from disappointment. It was pride—ambition—all the while, that was keeping her so cumbered with serving, and so careful and troubled about many things, though she doubtless thought it was nothing but love for the Lord. And hence it was, probably, that the Lord rebuked her. Supposing this to have been one of the faults at which the Savior aimed his condemnation, we may interpret his language as conveying, to all who are in Martha's situation, a hint as to their danger of falling into the same fault; and a caution to be watchful against it. It is not by any means to the high state and broad spheres that the self-seeking, self-exalting propensities of human nature limit themselves. It is not only in parliamentary halls and upon battlefields that triumphs are sought and trophies gathered. There are more Cæsars, a thousand-fold, in the world, than those that wear the purple and sit upon a throne. The cottage of a Martha may contain the soul of an Emperor. The domain of domestic life may be, and very often is, invaded by a spirit of ambition, and the lust

for ostentation and distinction. You may go into many a dwelling and find the master or the mistress "cumbered about much serving," and "careful and troubled about many things," and when you ask why, the answer will be, not because the comfort of the family demands it—not because any real interests of mind or body require it—not because good taste demands it, or is to be gratified by it—but simply because of the desires of the parties to eclipse or outshine their neighbors—simply because a luxurious imagination or a fondness for display or a craving for pre-eminence have led them to adopt a splendid ideal, according to which the style and method of their establishment must be adjusted. There is an uneasy, discontented straining after something superlative in all their arrangements. Pride is the real housekeeper in such dwellings; and pride is a fastidious and unreasonable and extravagant thing—a manager that has no standard to follow or aim at in its administration, but this single one—to go beyond and get above everybody else's standard.

Now in all such dwellings the Savior would find something to condemn. Not that Christianity is opposed to the exercise of a refined taste, or the employment of the arts of embellishment, in the construction and furnishing of our homes; not that it prohibits the exhibition of a generous liberality towards our neighbors and friends; this would be to set itself against the God of nature who has enriched the whole structure and economy of the physical world with forms of beauty and bountifulness. Christianity rather encourages these things. Its tendency is to purify and soften mankind, to promote neatness, courteousness, and even elegance in domestic life, to favor every method and device by which innocent enjoyment can be obtained for ourselves, or created for others, to make the myrtle tree supplant the briar, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose; but

all that is selfish and aspiring, all that serves only to pamper the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, all strife for pre-eminence, all vain-glorious parade, all anxiety and care engendered by the spirit of competition, or envy, or arrogance, all extravagance and pretension—Christianity does forbid. It curbs and chastens the inordinate desires of the natural heart. It commands men to take with thankfulness whatever good God has allotted to them, instead of restlessly grasping after the most and the best, which by any possibility they may get. It bids them be kindly affectioned one toward another, in honor preferring one another, instead of being unkindly emulous, one of another. It says, “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” “He that is greatest among you let him be as the younger and he that is chief as he that doth serve.” “Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be contented with such things as you have.” It rebukes Martha, wherever it finds her, not because she is hospitable, not because she is industrious, not because she would have her home neat and comfortable and pleasant, but because craving the admiration of her neighbors, intent upon the exhibition of her own skill and liberality, rather than a wise and decent management of her household, striving after a state and style suggested by pride rather than a regard for the real convenience of her family or guest, she has cumbered herself with superfluous services, and abandoned herself to expensive and immoderate cares and troubles. The spirit of the Lord is a spirit of liberty, because, amongst other things, it sets men free from bondage to that ambition, which is naturally predominant in the human heart; which makes men, everywhere, the slaves of selfish appetites and passions, of extravagant whims and fashions, and as a consequence, of unwholesome anxieties, and excessive and misdirected efforts and labors.

Leaving this point, I suppose we may detect in the conduct of Martha, indications of another error, which is peculiarly incident to domestic life; and that is the setting an undue value upon the means of earthly comfort, and upon a well-furnished and well-regulated home as the source and condition of happiness. We study such questions as "what shall we eat" and "what shall we drink" and "where withal shall we be clothed," with an earnestness and painfulness which is altogether disproportioned to their real merits. Could you have seen Martha, on the day of the Savior's visit, you might have thought from her anxious face and hurried steps, that she was engaged in the most important business of life; that if she succeeded in accomplishing the object she had in hand, she would have attained a satisfaction and a reward which were sufficient to compensate her fully for the employment of all her faculties of mind and body, taxed to the utmost stretch of their capacities. And so we might say of many another head of a household, "he or she is toiling for the food and raiment, for the comfort and adornment, for the enriching and aggrandizing of their household, as if these constituted the great end of life; as if these things being secured, happiness complete and permanent would be the certain result." Men do not labor for heaven as they labor to furnish and decorate their homes. Even Christian men, often, do not, if appearances tell the truth. And what is the inference? Clearly that they expect to find in these homes—their earthly inheritance—a satisfaction and a reward which outweigh all the advantages and pleasures which they are taught to associate with the enjoyment of heaven. I do not say they deliberately make such a comparison and decision; but, I mean to say, they devote themselves to the acquisition of the things which promise them happiness in this world, with a zeal and assiduity, which they do not

show in the pursuit of any other thing; and hence, that they treat these things as being primary in importance and supreme in value. Now all this is as unwise and useless, as it would be for a traveler, who was on a hasty march through a desert, to give himself up to the exclusion of all concern respecting the place where he was going, and the arrangements which were requisite for his well-being there—in order to the embellishing of his tent, to the drapery and the fringe which should ornament his bed, and the delicacies which should load his table. You would laugh at the childishness, if you did not more seriously condemn the improvidences and folly of such a man. And so, Christ rebuked Martha when he saw her toiling to prepare and accumulate the good things of this life, with an anxiety and eagerness, which he knew, their intrinsic worth and their power to bestow happiness, did not justify. And so, he says to men everywhere, as he sees them tasking hand and brain in the effort to gather around them the conveniences and luxuries and elegances of this world, “labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life!” “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!” “As pilgrims and strangers abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul!” “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness” (that is worldly possessions of any kind), “do not regard them and depend upon them as an ultimate portion, since they cannot satisfy you and will not remain with you long, but make of them friends and helpers, use them as subordinate to a higher good, for which they may prepare you, that when ye fail they may receive you (or open the way for you), into everlasting habitations.” In all such counsels the Lord is saying to these busy, mis-

guided experimenters, "why cumber yourselves with such hard serving? Why be so careful and troubled about many things? Your toil will never be repaid. Your acquisitions, when possessed, will not meet your expectations. The fashion of this world passeth away. The time is short, it remaineth that they that have wives be as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not. It is laboring for naught—for that which satisfieth not—to spend life in building your houses and adorning your grounds and rearing your families, if you have nothing more and nothing better to depend upon, as your security for happiness for these things; for they may disappoint you, and they must leave you; and just in proportion to the value you have set upon them, and the trust you have reposed in them, will be the loss you will suffer when they do disappoint or leave you. Think of the rich man, who in the excess of his prosperity had to pull down his old barns and build greater that he might find store-room for his fruits and goods, as that sudden message came checking his prosperity and disappointing his anticipated enjoyment—"thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided!" Estimate, if you can, the blankness, the distress, the despair, with which his mind must have been overwhelmed! Oh, fool, indeed, to have staked his all upon a thing so unsubstantial as earthly goods, and a thing so frail as human life! He had striven hard to add field to field, he had wet his land with the sweat of his brow, he had spent years of weary toiling and scheming to get to his present acme of success; and now the bubble bursts! Why did he cumber himself, so? Why allow himself to be so careful and troubled about a bubble which was soon to burst? And

what are those doing among us who are working for the accumulation of riches, for the increase of their means of pleasure, for the gratification of their affections and appetites, entwining their heart strings closer and closer about their loved ones and friends, inventing new charms and new ties to bind them to their homes, harvesting the fruits of their daily toil and laying out broad schemes and picturing long vistas of happiness for the future—what are they doing if they are seeking for themselves no better portion than this, but cumbering themselves and allowing themselves to be careful and troubled about a bubble which is sure to burst? This world, I know, has no claims so strong, no interests so dear, no joys so sweet, as those which appertain to the family; but these claims are not paramount, these interests are not ultimate, these joys are not superlative. The favor of God and the blessedness of heaven are things which are better and more important and more needful than they.

But the error of Martha may have been something more serious, even, than this. At least there is an error more serious than this, which those in Martha's situation may commit. It is that of making fidelity to the duties of domestic life equivalent to, or identical with, the religion of the Gospel. Nothing is more certain, judging from the common expressions of the people, than that multitudes are depending upon the anxious and diligent attention they have paid to the wants and interests of their families as the ground upon which they expect to be saved. If you were to go to this hard-working, never-resting father, or this careworn, painstaking mother, and say to each of them, "you are too much burdened with worldly engagements, your minds are too much absorbed with your household affairs, we fear you are neglecting the one thing needful, that you are putting out of view the great business of life,

the preparation of the soul for heaven," you would very likely be told in reply, "why is not this piety? Am I not doing my duty? Am I not a good parent? Am I not doing my duty in watching over my children, in providing for them, in fitting them for respectable posts in the world? Is not this what the Bible requires?" Yes, my friend, this is what the Bible requires. It is right. It is your duty, provided it is all done as the result of your regard for the will and the glory of God, provided it has been coupled always with a filial love and subjection to God, and with an humble dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only savior of sinners; but is it so with you? Your very devotion to your families may have been the means of keeping you from honoring God and believing in his Son. You may be amiable, affectionate, benevolent and yet not pious. Martha may be wearing herself out, she may be bringing furrows into her cheeks, and gray hairs upon her brow, by her untiring labor and self-torturing solicitude for her household. Her kindred may not have words strong enough to express their gratitude for her service and sacrifice, and yet God, all the while, may be uttering the complaint, "My daughter thou hast never given me thine heart." And Christ may be all the while bringing against her the fatal charge, "thou hast loved father and mother, son and daughter more than me, and thou canst not be my disciple." To him who knows the heart, our Lord has said, a thing may be an abomination which among men is highly esteemed; and on the ground of which men are accustomed to justify themselves. It may be so with these much-landed domestic virtues. Estimable, lowly, useful as they are, they may be tainted and defiled with the sin of idolatry, and so become offensive in the sight of God rather than meritorious. They may give occasion for the greatest wrong which can be inflicted upon him—that of rejecting

him and degrading him for the sake of serving and pleasing a creature—that of thrusting him from the heart, because that heart has lavished all its love and devotion upon earthly relatives and friends.

And still another error indicated by Martha's case, and especially liable to occur in domestic life, is the surrendering of the mind to secular duties to such a degree, that religious duties are slighted or omitted altogether. On this point those who have the charge of families need to be solemnly warned. There is many another house besides that one in Bethany, where the Savior's voice fails to get a hearing; many another person hinders this busy, bustling woman of whom I am speaking, who has been too much cumbered with serving and too full of cares and troubles, to stop to listen to the counsels and instructions of Jesus. It is really hard amidst the multiplied and varied claims of household engagements, to find the time and the heart to attend to the duties of religion. I know this will be the testimony of many who hear me. You say you are driven from morning till night by the perpetual demands upon your thought and attention, which grow out of the occurrences, ordinary and extraordinary, of your domestic life. You have no composure, no opportunity for retirement, no leisure, no tranquility. Hence, you have given up secret prayer. Perhaps, you no more commune with your God in your closet. You have given up reading the Scripture, and meditating upon its truths. Your mind is tossed about and swept onward by a tide of unholy influences, so that it cannot even on the Sabbath acquire serenity and seriousness enough to apply itself comfortably to spiritual things. This is all very deplorable, and, let me say, very wrong; and very dangerous too. Martha must surely renounce the name of a disciple of Christ, if Christ comes within her doors, and she consents to lose all the precious words he

may have to say. Martha surely is most unwisely cumbered with serving, she surely is allowing her cares and troubles to engross her too much, when, as a consequence, she must be divorced day after day from the Savior and the Holy Spirit. My Christian friends, do not excuse yourselves too readily in this matter! Your engagements and interruptions may be, and no doubt are many. Every home abounds with them, petty often, perhaps, but none the less urgent and harrassing. To be good masters and mistresses, good parents and neighbors, you must submit to many annoyances and distractions, but nothing can relieve you from your obligation to be good servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in order to do this you must attend to the duties of private, personal religion. You must maintain the disposition and find the opportunity to wait upon God daily. You must keep up prayer and the study of the Bible, and devout reading and meditation, and self-examination, and attendance upon the public worship of God. Otherwise your religion will decline and dwindle away, till every evidence of it is gone, or only enough of it remains to keep your conscience uneasy and your heart miserable, amidst the cares and troubles to which you have abandoned yourselves. Oh, brethren, keep Christ in your dwellings! Court the presence of the Holy Spirit there! Endeavor to have the blessing of your Heavenly Father abiding there! You will be doing more for yourself and your families by these means, depend upon it, than you can ever do by all your efforts and pains and sacrifices.

And now, I might instance as another fault apparent in Martha, a fretful and impatient temper. Hurrying to and fro as she was in her haste and eagerness, she wished to drive everything and everybody else along with her. She could not bear, therefore, to see her sister differently employed. She was ready to condemn her because her tastes

and feelings did not coincide with her own; and she accordingly (with very questionable propriety) complained of her to Christ and requested him to rebuke her. Is not this incident true to nature? And are we not pointed here, to one of the infirmities and sins which is peculiarly liable to be developed in domestic life? What confession do you more frequently make than that the cares and troubles of your household irritate and vex you? That they try your temper and exhaust your patience? What fault do you so often have to reproach yourselves for, as the exhibition of a petulant, hasty, irascible spirit? Then, here, is a reproof and an admonition of very extensive applicability presented to you in the text. Guard against the temptations to fretfulness and impatience which will be continually springing up in your domestic life! And let it be an argument why you should not suffer your minds to fall too much, under the influence of your cares and troubles, that these are very likely to foster a fretful and impatient disposition; Try not to multiply your cares and troubles, needlessly; And invent no unreal ones. Learn to meet those which are real and unavoidable, cheerfully. Nothing is well done that is done in a heat and passion. Reprove a servant or punish a child, in a rage, and your reproof or punishment will do little or no good; for to reprove or punish to good purpose you need to be respected and loved by the person reproved or punished. And no one can be respected or loved while in a rage. And besides, you are setting an example of one fault all the while you are reproofing or punishing another. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom," says Solomon of the virtuous woman, "and in her tongue is the law of kindness." If you will have families, you must just make up your mind to have cares and troubles; and you ought therefore to anticipate them, and prepare

yourselves for them. You ought to gird yourselves with patience and meekness, you ought to be slow to wrath, to be prudent and deliberate, to be gentle even in firmness, and tender even in severity. And to be and do all this, you ought to cry to God for daily grace as you do for daily bread.

And one point more is suggested by the case of Martha, to which I shall allude in closing. Her sister was anxious to sit as a learner at the feet of Jesus. The opportunity was a rare one, to become acquainted with the Gospel—to gain a spiritual blessing. Martha would have prevented this improvement, that she wished to make of this opportunity. The Savior evidently condemned her for interfering with so reasonable and pious a design. The business of the household might even have been more pressing than it was, and yet the business of saving a soul was something which would have been more pressing still; and it was a profane hand that Martha would have laid upon her sister when she would have thrust her back from the wells of salvation. The pressure of domestic duties must not make us indifferent to the spiritual interests of our dependents. We must take care that nothing in our regimen or method in our homes shall put an obstacle in the way of the piety of our families. Christ will judge us strictly, we may be assured, for every rule or custom that has a tendency to keep our children or servants from his feet. Let us rather by our example and precept and influence endeavor to bring them all to the knowledge of the Savior! Let us open to them freely the advantages of the Sabbath, encouraging them to make the best use of the time that God has given them for gaining the preparation they need for his heavenly kingdom! Let us see to it that when our households meet us at the judgment-bar, they shall have no

occasion for saying that through the much serving and many cares and troubles with which we cumbered ourselves and them, they were denied the privilege of learning from Jesus the tidings of his great salvation!



THE DENIAL OF MOSES' PRAYER.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1852.

"I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.—DEUTERONOMY 3:25:26.

THE desire which Moses expressed in this prayer was one which lay very near to his heart, and it was most natural that it should. Canaan was the land of promise which had been hovering before the eye of the Israelitish race like some isle of beauty on the ocean's distant verge, ever since the covenant which God had made with Abraham. It has been the land of expectation to wanderers through the wilderness, attracting to it their most anxious thoughts, and eager hopes, every day and hour since the exodus from Egypt. It was hard to die without touching its soil; hard after the weariness and suffering of so long a race to die without grasping the goal. And especially hard to one like Moses who had almost carried his people as a father would a child in his arms, and whose heart had learned to throb with *but one wish* to see his charge deposited and secured in a country, and a home. And it seems to us *almost unjust* to deny him so natural a wish. We feel almost as if the boon he sought was but the due reward of his long continued and arduous labor. The husbandman's toil we are apt to think, is but receiving its fair recompense when he

reaps his crop. But Moses after all his protracted and complicated toil, and when the fruit and ripened grain was just ready to be gathered, must quit the field, and leave to other hands the work of harvesting the golden sheaves. God had said it; and adhered irrevocably to his decree, "thou shalt not go in thither to the good land; let it suffice thee, speak no more unto me of the matter."

We see here an instance of the denial of prayer; and the denial of it though the circumstances were such as seems to us, to have made the granting of it reasonable and probable, and though the person offering it was one who had enjoyed in an unusual measure the favors of God, and who had prevailed in many a suit before where it would have seemed to us less likely that he would have prevailed. The peculiarities of this case are such as commend it to us as a subject for study; and I will make it my aim this morning to develop a few of the lessons and truths which may be embodied in it.

We at once learn from it the fact that the prayers of a good man, urgently and repeatedly expressed, may be denied. The assurance that God has given us that he will hear and answer prayer, are sufficient to encourage us on the largest scale, to practice it, and sufficient to make us depend upon it far more than we do, as a means of obtaining the blessings we need. So strong are these assurances that it has become an aphorism on this subject, that "man by prayer can move the lever that moves the world," as if prayer could command the very omnipotence of God. The aphorism may with due caution, be adopted as true. And yet, we see Moses, with whom it has been no uncommon occurrence to move the arm of the Almighty in the working of miracles, baffled completely in trying to move it upon the occasion before us, by prayer. God who by his power had opened a path for him through the

Red Sea, now by the same power hedges up his way across Jordan, and bars him from the promised land. Now, how shall we harmonize these apparently conflicting facts? I answer by recognizing this obvious principle that prayer, or anything else, can never move the arm of God to do wrong. His omnipotence never diverges from the track of his rectitude. It is always exercised so as to maintain the order, and subserve the ends of his moral government. And prayer will seek in vain to touch the springs of his omnipotence, if the direction it would give to that omnipotence would be counter, in any way to his rectitude, or to the order and ends of his moral government. This principle Abraham recognized when he was interceding for Sodom. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" he asks; and it was because he supposed it would not be right that the good should be punished with the wicked, that he prayed that if fifty righteous men should be found in the city it might escape. As Abraham here intimates, God always retains his office of Judge and Ruler of the earth; and knows nothing of any other office, or exercise of any other power, which opposes or obstructs this.

When it is wrong to grant prayer he does not grant it. It is our happiness as needy and dependent creatures to know that as our kind benefactor, he hears and answers prayer. It is our safety as ignorant and erring ones, to know that as the moral Governor of the universe he never hears or answer prayer when it is not right to do so. Were he merely the answerer of prayer, did he like some weak human parent, allow himself to be persuaded and controlled merely by the wishes of his children, he would grant us every prayer, however much we or others might have occasion to regret his unwise indulgence afterwards. But as he is a judge too, in the earth, as his policy towards men is shaped and conducted so as to uphold the principles and

secure the results which as a righteous sovereign he is bound to regard, he must, in accordance with this policy disappoint his children in all their unwise and improper requests. And it is really as much for their good as for his own honor that he does so.

As an illustration of this let me use the allegory, employed in one place by an apostle, of the body and its members. The foot for instance, impatient under the hard labor to which it is subjected, as the servant of the whole body, might ask to be released from its uncomfortable bondage, and separated from the body. But would he who made the body as it is, who has inwoven his laws with its very texture; and made important purposes to be dependent upon its actual organization, listen to such a request? And if he should would it not be to mutilate and destroy the member which was foolishly hoping for benefit from the favor for which it had petitioned? Or the arm, tortured by some painful sore, might beg to be relieved from its sufferings by having the cause of it at once removed? But God might see that the immediate healing of the sore would throw disease back upon the whole body, an event which would inflict its calamitous consequences upon the arm as well as the other members of the body, while in the ultimate health which its temporary suffering was to be the means of giving to the whole body, the arm would share in common with every other part. Would he then grant its request? Man's best security for happiness, we may be sure, is found in the permanence of the moral government which God exercises over us, and over the world with which we are so largely identified, and it would be a thousand times better that like the arm and the foot of which I have spoken, we should be kept in a position which is uncomfortable for us or refused deliverance from some grievance which distresses us, than that one principle essential to that government

should be invaded, or one end contemplated by it should be defeated. If ever there was a case in which out of partiality for an individual, God might have been expected to waive every other office in order to appear in that if the answerer of prayer it was this, which is referred to in our text. Moses surely would have been indulged here if it were even possible for God to grant the request of a creature, without regard to the right or wrong of it. But Moses was denied; and it was doubtless for the upholding of some principle, or the accomplishment of some result which God, as the administrator of a moral government in the earth could not abandon that he was denied.

Consider further that God is the immutable enemy, and the inflexible punisher of sin. It was on account of the sin which Moses had committed at the water of Meribah, (an account of which you will find in the 20th chapter of Numbers,) that God had declared that Moses should not enter the land of Canaan. This sin was not one which we should have called flagrant. It was merely a distrust of God, and an impatience of temper toward the people excited by their complaint at their want of water in the wilderness. As the Psalmist describes it, "they the people provoked his spirit so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips."

This, according to the common estimate of men, would have been regarded as a very venial offence; and besides, it had been followed by a considerable period of active and unwavering obedience to God; so that if a man's good deeds can atone for his bad ones, here was an ample compensation rendered by Moses to God for his faults. If ever sin could be supposed to be forgotten by God, it surely could be so in a case like this. If ever any circumstances could justify the presumption that sin would be overlooked by God, it was such circumstances as may be found in the life of Moses, subsequently to the occurrence at Meribah.

But his sin was not overlooked. In God's memory it lived. It clung to its author and followed him, drawing its dark trail along the track of his life, till at last when the Jordan had been reached the execution could no longer be delayed, it appeared before him to claim the threatened penalty, and threw its stern barrier between him and the goodly land which he so longed to tread. And his earnest and oft repeated prayers were unable to set the barrier aside. Now in all this, Moses is made to us the expositor of three truths connected with sin, which it is of the highest importance that men should know.

One is that God marks sin, and that he remembers it. The evil passion of the heart, and the angry words upon the lips, does not escape his notice; and the record of it lives ineffacably before his sleepless eye. Another is that a threat of punishment follows immediately upon the commission of sin. The transgression and the curse, the guilt and the penal evil, have been linked together from the beginning. If they were not separated in Moses' case, in whose case can we hope to see them separated? And the third truth is that nothing but a special warrant or revocation from God can authorize a hope on the part of the sinner that his offence will be passed over without punishment. All presumption, or conjecture, or hypothesis, in such a case is worthless. Nothing but a positive assurance from God that the sentence has been canceled, and the sinner absolved, can give a good hope of escape from punishment. And the penalty accordingly in Moses' case was executed. The wages of sin were demanded, even of this good man. Now when we see judgment thus "beginning at the house of God," and taking effect upon one who stood so eminent in God's house, may we not ask with the apostle Peter, "what shall the end be of them which obey not the Gospel of God?" Sin and its penalty like the fruit and the tree are insepar-

able facts. What is the condition of that man against whom the threat of a just punishment has gone forth, and who is yet refusing to comply with the requirements of that Gospel which offers to men the only warrant they can have that God has revoked the sentence and absolved them from their liability to death? You may argue and speculate as much, as you please about the matter but when you have done all, you will not have put yourself in a position in which you can have any better reason for believing that you will escape from the threatened penalty of sin than Moses had. You cannot do more or repent more, or, pray more than he did; and yet the edict of revocation never was issued in his case, and his sentence stood, therefore was inflexibly executed. And God has taught us that it is in the Gospel alone that the sinner is ever to find a warrant or assurance that his sentence has been revoked. He may persuade himself that he will not be punished, but he has no other evidence of his safety than his own gratuitous assumptions.

He has no pledge from God, and without such a pledge his condition (to say the most of it) cannot be better than that of Moses; and in regard to him we have seen the threat going on steadily to its fulfillment. And what other prospects can the sinner ever have?

But in the Gospel we have offered to us the pledge which we need. We have God's seal, his sign manual, so to speak, put to the promise, "he that believeth shall be saved." There is a warrant here, assuring him that the sentence pronounced against him is revoked, he can depend upon it, and go forth from his prison house rejoicing like an acquitted criminal. But in the absence of this warrant, if the man cannot lay his hand upon the Gospel and say, "I have got my acquittance here," the sentence stands against him in all its entireness and force, it will infallibly go forward in due time to execution.

Oh, is it not a fearful thought to go into eternity, to stand before the bar of your judge, without your warrant authenticated by himself, absolving you from the penalty of those sins which are to be arrayed against you there? You may have arguments innumerable; speculations and theories innumerable; good deeds and prayers innumerable, but if you have not your warrant, your Gospel warrant, the only one which bears the signature of God, your sentence stands unrevoked, and as surely as Moses was compelled to meet his, and die out of Canaan, so you will be compelled to meet yours, and be banished from the kingdom of God.

“He that believeth on the Son,” it is written, “hath eternal life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Now in view of all that I have said, must we not receive the denial of Moses' prayer as a testimony of the strongest possible kind in favor of the immutable enmity of God toward sin, and of his inflexible determination to punish it? And do we not see how it was thus made to uphold the principles and subserve the ends of God's moral government of the world?

But still another lesson taught us by that event is this, that God is jealous, (to use a scriptural form of speech) of his own glory, and so orders his policy as to check and rebuke the disposition which is naturally inherent in man to claim for himself, or a fellow being, the honor which belongs to God. The human instrument is very apt to expand and exalt itself so as to eclipse the Divine hand which has used and moved it. This cannot be tolerated consistently with the moral government which God exercises amongst men, and so he puts down the ambitious instrument, and by its abasement forces the world to see the Divine hand which had been acting through the instrument. Hero-worship is generally idolatry, generally an act of treason toward

the sovereign who has said, "thou shalt have no other Gods before me." If ever there was a mortal who occupied a position likely to attract to himself this hero-worship, which men are so ready to pay, it was Moses. For to whom did God ever delegate so much of his authority and power as to him? Who ever was admitted to such measures of intercourse? Who ever climbed such dizzy heights of intimacy with God as he? And if ever, in after days of degeneracy, the truant heart of the Israelite should wander like those of the people around them into idolatry, what so likely as that national pride should deify the great hero who had led them from the house of bondage, and that altars should be raised to Moses, and the shout go up, "this is thy God O Israel? Whether this should be so or not it was important for the world that the instrument more signally honored by God, than all others, should be shown to be after all, but an instrument, in itself weak and worthless. And so Moses was made suffer, a dark eclipse when the star of his glory might be said to be just at the point of culmination. Higher and higher it had risen, till it was about to plant itself in full orb'd splendor in the zenith when the shadow passes over it and its radiant track loses itself in inextricable gloom. Moses, who had lived so like a god, must die an infirm, erring, accountable man. He must die with the rebuke of Jehovah upon him; die humbled by being denied so natural a request, as that he might touch with his feet the land which for forty years he had been toiling to reach, die with the hand of God which had lifted him up to so high a pitch of glory thrusting him down to disappointment, and disgrace, and a solitary and unknown grave.

"He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord" seems to be the lesson taught to the world by this closing of his career. The human agent must perform his part in the

drama of affairs, so that the government of God shall be maintained and advanced, not weakened and undermined by his agency. "Unto Him belongeth the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." and no more emphatic enunciation of this fact can be found perhaps than we have in the refusal of God to grant to Moses the long cherished desire of his heart.

And one truth more involved in the signification of the text, is that labor for God is its own recompense, or that men ought to serve God from the inherent propriety and goodness of the thing, and not merely out of regard for an extrinsic and tangible reward. Whether we are to see the fruit to which our labors tend or not, those labors ought to be diligently and perseveringly prosecuted. The spirit of the true child of God is not a mercenary one. It is a spirit which acts willingly and spontaneously, in harmony with his will. It says "thy will be done," by a law of nature, because it is the will of God which is to be done, that will which all creatures when fulfilling the proper business of their being, ought to be uniting to do. It is natural for us to ask a reward for our services, and we are apt to make the obligation to render them depend upon the assurance we have that the reward will be paid in the form and measure which we prescribe. In other words it is for our own sake, and not God's sake that we propose to serve him. He would have a better spirit in us. He would have us serve him as the angels in heaven do, not as hired servants, but as loving children. So Moses wrought and wrought long and well, and yet died without the price his natural feelings so anxiously craved. So many another Moses has risen up as a champion of the church to lead her out of bondage; has fought her battles, and traveled with her through the wilderness and then died without seeing the promised land. So the Pastor labors

for his flock and the parent for his children, prays that he may see the fruit of his toil in the salvation of those for whom his soul is yearning, and dies without the sight. But all have had an ample reward in being permitted to labor for God, and usually this is the only reward which it is safe for us to have, while liable as we always are, in the flesh, to be betrayed into infirmity and sin. Great and good men have appeared from time to time in the world, and have gone through it spending their strength as faithful workers for God, and then died, perhaps in reproach and obscurity, but flinging as they died a radiance over coming centuries which has guided to God, and to heaven thousands who were born after their names had been forgotten; and others too; bold and energetic workers whose reward has come in their own time, and to whom success has been as poison, intoxicating the brain, and deranging the heart, till they have toppled from their giddy heights and died, leaving the world to mourn that such blasted genius had ever been born. It is best for us, my friends that it should be as God ordinarily arranges it, that the privilege of laboring should be taken by man, as his true and proper reward, leaving to God himself to appropriate the gain and the glory of his labor. And any different policy, I believe a little reflection will convince us would be altogether inconsistent with the moral government which God maintains over men. May we not see then why on this account the prayer of Moses was denied? But perhaps in connection with these remarks upon the denial of Moses' prayer, I should introduce before closing, another fact in his history, which the Scriptures record, which after all looks very much like an answer to his prayer. In the form in which he wished to be permitted to enter the land of Canaan, his request was denied but in a different form he was indulged with the very privilege which he sought. Years had passed on since he

died on the lonely top of Mount Nebo, centuries with all their usual vicissitudes had rolled over the land, when on a certain day on another mountain top; within the borders of ancient Canaan, a wondrous group was gathered. A glory brighter than the magnificence of earth enveloped them, and of one of the group, it is said, "his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light." This one was the Son of God, the Divine Messiah, come to set up the true kingdom of God, and to enact the work of the world's redemption, upon the soil of Canaan. The end for which the Israelites had been chosen and preserved in Egypt and led thence into the country which God had promised to their fathers, was now to be accomplished. The true result for which Moses had labored was now to be realized. And now Moses' feet do touch that soil, he stands where he had once prayed to stand, when God denied his prayer, for it is Moses who is here, conversing with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. God had granted him that which was better than the boon his prayer had asked. And we may well believe that he will not do less for us. Let us pray and labor on,³ and though now it may be his policy to disappoint our prayers, and leave our labors without the desired reward, the time will come when we shall stand with Christ, at his second appearing, and learn as the fruits of His redemption are gathered home, how God has more than answered our prayers, and more than recompensed our labors, which seemed to us all unanswered and unrewarded when we went to our graves on earth.



THE DEADNESS OF THE PLEASURE-SEEKER.

NOVEMBER 15, 1857.

“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”—
I. TIMOTHY 5:6.

THE feminine pronoun is used in this proposition, only because it is connected with a passage in which the Apostle had been speaking of a particular class of females. The proposition itself is general. For any one to live in pleasure, is to be dead while he lives, is the doctrine enunciated. It is a doctrine which will no doubt sound very paradoxical to some; for in the phraseology of a large portion of mankind, to live in pleasure, is the formula by which they describe the very climax and perfection of living. To live in pleasure, in their view, is not only not to be dead, but it is to realize life in its highest form and degree. It is, in the language current amongst them, to “enjoy life,” to “be making the most of life,” and to show that one “knows how to live.” Now across the track of this common notion, the text appears throwing itself in direct antagonism, making the bold declaration that the individual, no matter who he may be, who lives in pleasure, is dead while he lives. And is not then, that popular reproach, that the Bible is the enemy of pleasure, true? me-thinks I hear some objector exclaiming. Is it not manifest that religion does lay an interdiction upon human enjoyment? that those who would lead a life of piety, accord-

ing to the requirements of Christianity, must put on the monk's cowl or the nun's veil, and turn the home into a cloister, and the world into a wilderness, and spend their days in the exercise of penance and mortification? And is there not good ground for that effort which certain men of literary and political celebrity are making, in our day, to rid society of the yoke of evangelical austerity, by turning the Sabbath into a holiday, and substituting the pleasure-garden and the playhouse for the Sanctuary, and the dance for the prayer-meeting, and the fairy-tale and the novel for the catechism and tract? No, my friends, to all these interrogatories, I return an emphatic no! Religion does not merit this unamiable character you would give it, nor do those who practice it need your pity. Most true it is that our supreme oracle, on the subject, says, that he that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth; but at the same time we hear it giving forth to the world such an utterance as this, "rejoice evermore," calling on men, not only to be happy, but to be so in that full and intense form which is expressed by "rejoicing," and not only to be so occasionally, but perpetually—"evermore." We find David praying under the direction of the Holy Spirit, "satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." We find Christ saying to his disciples, "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." And we find Paul describing Christians as those who "worship God and rejoice in Christ Jesus." Now, it is very evident, that if there is anything to be found in the experience of Christians, corresponding to the import of these terms, the life of those who obey the Gospel is the farthest thing possible from that state of dreariness and gloom which the objector insinuates it to be. "Ah, but," says the objector, "I do not call this joy, which the Bible represents the Christian as possessing. Pleasure, I see no pleasure in it.

My pleasure, the Bible does forbid, does take away from me." And here, the objector betrays the real shape and substance of his charge against the Bible. It amounts to this, and no more, that the Bible does not adopt his definition of pleasure; and the fair and honest way of stating his charge against the Bible would be, not that it is the enemy of pleasure, absolutely, but that it is the enemy of pleasure according to his idea of it, can be urged against it as a reproach, and can be justly construed into an offence, he must show that his idea of pleasure is a right one—one that will bear the test of the legitimate criteria of pleasure, as a thing to be enjoyed by man. The Bible, if his idea of pleasure is a wrong one, is really proving itself, in the best way possible, the friend of man and the patron of his pleasures, by opposing it; since to combat an error or to extricate man from a wrong idea, is always to benefit him, and to improve, so far, his prospects of happiness. Nothing is clearer than that there are many ideas of pleasure, entertained by men, which are wrong. The besotted opium-eater realizes his idea of pleasure in the sensations produced by the use of that poisonous drug. No one in his senses, would call his idea of pleasure a right one. The ideas of pleasure current in the world are endlessly various. They vary with the character, the tastes, the appetites of the individual. Things diametrically opposite, may be the sources of pleasure to two different persons. One man's meat may be another man's poison. What is one man's delight is another man's abomination. All the ideas of pleasure entertained by men cannot be right, therefore, unless we maintain that all men, whatever may be the diversity in men's character, tastes and appetites, are equally right. And if we maintain this, what becomes of the distinction between the good man and the bad man, the virtuous man and the vicious man? Here is

a drunkard reeling through your streets, a disgrace to himself, and an offence to the community; squandering the money that should have bought his wife and children bread, at the dram-shop, and finding his pleasure in the excitement of strong-drink, and the gross ribaldry of pot-house companionship. Anon, through the operation of some blessed power, you see that drunkard become a reformed man. He has taken his place amongst you as a decent, sober, respectable member of society. He pursues industriously his trade or profession. He earns a comfortable support for his family. He has a home, and in the bosom of that home, surrounded by domestic endearments and sympathies, he tastes a joy which brings with it no satiety, and leaves behind it no remorse. He is a totally different man, now, from what he was before. If he is right in what he is now, he could not have been right in what he was before. It would be the height of absurdity to say, that he was equally right, as a drunkard and as a sober man. He knows better and everybody else knows better. There is a distinction which must be recognized between these two characters. And just the same distinction must be drawn between the idea of pleasure, which belonged to him as a drunkard, and that which belongs to him as a sober man. If the latter is right the former must have been wrong. They cannot possibly be equally right. The idea of pleasure which he entertained as a drunkard was wrong, because as a drunkard he was wrong himself. It was only one of the types and symptoms, by which the wrongness of the man himself expressed itself. Change the man—make him a sober man, and you change his idea of pleasure. In other words convert him from a wrong man to a right one, and you will convert his idea of pleasure from a wrong one to a right one. It will not do, therefore, to bring the charge of being the enemy of pleasure against the Bible,

because it is found opposing some, or even many, of the things, which are regarded by men as pleasure. Because we know, that the idea of pleasure entertained by some and even many men is a wrong one. You must first demonstrate that the idea of pleasure which the Bible opposes is a right one, before you can make such a charge good; for you are only establishing its claim to be regarded as the guardian and promoter of human happiness, when you affirm that it is the enemy of the wrong ideas of pleasure which men have adopted.

Now, what is the right idea of pleasure? Or what is required to make pleasure real and true? To answer this question, it is evident from what I have said, that we must first determine what it is that constitutes a man's right, in his character, tastes and appetites; since his idea of pleasure, or his pleasure itself will correspond in every case, with what he is himself, in his character, tastes and appetites. The Bible determines this point by saying that religion, and religion alone, constitutes a man's right in his character, tastes and appetites. And by this declaration, it means that religion, and religion alone, brings a man into conformity with the laws of reason, of nature, and of God. A man without religion must violate some of these laws. He generally violates them all. And his idea of pleasure, or his pleasure itself, will be, like himself, at variance with some or all of these laws. And therefore, it cannot be right. It is a wrong idea, it is a false thing. Take the man who is pursuing a form of pleasure, which is contrary to the laws of reason. As he must be always, more or less cognizant of the judgment of his reason, he must be always, more or less conscious of the fact that his pleasure is unreasonable. He must carry in his mind the conviction that he is a fool, in pursuing it. And I say therefore, that it cannot be real pleasure, for that can never be real or true

pleasure to a man, which is all the while demonstrating to his own consciousness that he is a fool.

Or take the man who is pursuing a form of pleasure, which is contrary to the laws of nature. Contrariety to nature, or violence done to nature, will infallibly bring disorder and suffering into the mind, or body, or both. Nature is the sternest of all masters. You might as well ask fire not to burn you, or water not to drown you, as to ask her to relax or change her ordinances to accommodate you. Trespass against her rules in any material point, and the avenging distemper or mutilation, the retributive fever, or sore, or bruise, or fracture, will follow, as surely as the rifle-ball follows the flash of the gunpowder, or the stroke of the serpent's fang, the pressure of the foot that treads upon him. That form of pleasure then that men seek from courses of conduct that thwart or violate the laws of nature, cannot be true or real pleasure; because it sooner or later ends in pain. It is no more true or real pleasure, than that sensation would be, which you would experience in swallowing the sugared drug, which you knew would be no sooner swallowed, than it would rack your body with torment, and taint your system with a deadly venom. Or take the man, who is pursuing a form of pleasure, which is contrary to the law of God. The price of his pleasure, here, must be the forfeiture of the favor of God, which must ever stand as the fundamental condition of happiness to man. God and the man who transgresses his laws, must stand as enemies. There is in the nature of the case, a strife between them. God's will and the man's will are set in direct variance. In order that the man's will should be indulged, God's will must be overthrown. And if this can be done with impunity, if man can so triumph over God, God's will is nugatory. It is nothing, a cobweb, a rope of sand. He might as well have no will. He might as well

lay aside his crown, nay, he had better do so, for he wears it only to have it dishonored. I hold it then, self-evident, that a man who seeks his pleasure in ways that contravene the law of God, is putting himself in a position, where he must expect to feel, sometime, in some form, the opposition of God, which is only another name for his wrath. And what can the wrath of God be but a consuming fire? Is that, I ask, true or real pleasure, which has such an issue as this? Which is kindling all the while against the person, who indulges in it, the flames of Almighty vengeance? Now, the Bible teaches, as I have said before, that religion, and religion only, constitutes a man such in his character, tastes and appetites, that he is conformed to these laws of reason, nature and God. And as a corollary to this, it teaches that the man who has religion, or the Christian, is the only person whose idea of pleasure is right, or who, in the pursuit of pleasure, is seeking an object which is really and truly entitled to that name. If this teaching of the Bible be correct, then it has this answer to make to the objector, "You charge me with being the enemy of all pleasure, because, perchance, I am opposed to what you think to be pleasure. What you think to be pleasure is not necessarily pleasure. The idea of pleasure entertained by many persons is manifestly wrong. If yours is like this, it is the part of benevolence in me, towards you and towards all men, to forbid and condemn your pleasure. Religion, I hold, to be absolutely indispensable, to give to man such a character, such tastes and such appetites, as shall fit him to entertain a right idea of pleasure, or to enjoy true and real pleasure. I enjoin religion upon men, as the necessary means to their happiness; and I promise to all who truly possess it, and faithfully practice it, pleasure, as the certain result. If I am found opposing your pleasure, it is only because your pleasure is

something which religion did not originate, and does not approve, and something therefore, which is not legitimate pleasure. I am not the enemy of your pleasure, except as I am the enemy of your irreligion, and except as I see your pleasure, which is the product of your irreligion, vitally at war with your true happiness. Only open your heart to the influences of that religion which I teach! Put off the old man, with his corrupt affections, and put on the new man, which is created in Christ Jesus after the image of God! Become a hearty, intelligent Christian, and with your new character, tastes and appetites, you will gain a new idea of pleasure, and a new enjoyment, which you will no more consent to exchange for the old, than the drunkard, reformed, would exchange his present decency and comfort for his former brutality and wretchedness!

These observations, designed to repel the charge, sometimes made against the Bible, that it is opposed to human enjoyment, will serve to show what the Bible means, when on the one hand it exhorts men to be happy, and on the other, it says of the man who lives in pleasure, he is dead while he liveth. There is a pleasure, which is the offspring of religion. That pleasure the Bible approves and recommends. There is a pleasure, which grows out of a state of irreligion, which is itself the mark and proof, that the heart that seeks it is opposed to religion, and that pleasure the Bible opposes and condemns. It is this latter kind of pleasure which is referred to by the Apostle in the text. The word translated, living in pleasure, means living luxuriously or voluptuously. It is derived from a noun which signifies rich or delicious fare, food which is partaken of, not to allay hunger, but to please the palate; and we shall have the precise idea conveyed by it, properly, if we take it as describing those, who in their whole system of life, act in the spirit of a man, who sits down to a sumptuous

and delicate feast. There are persons whose whole system of life may be said to be informed or pervaded by such a spirit; persons whose whole existence is an Epicurean entertainment, or an attendance upon an Epicurean entertainment. They are found, of course, in many grades, and in many forms, from the highest type of extravagance and dissipation, to the most parsimonious and unobtrusive forms of self-indulgence. The seeking of pleasure, of private, personal gratification, as the supreme end of life—the common mark of them all. They may be likened to the guests at a banquet, with each his separate dish before him. The viands are endlessly various, but each individual has what his taste calls for, and though on different fare they all eat with the same relish, and are all intent upon the same object, the pampering of the appetite. And when the banquet is over each could describe the act in which he had been engaged, by the same terms, “I have indulged myself.” So, of these persons, who live in pleasure, whatever be the mode of life or the species of pleasure, you will have a description which fits the case of each one of them, if you say as the sum of what each one has done, “he has indulged himself, nothing else, nothing more.” From morning to night, from year to year, to indulge himself has been his business. The world for him may be said to have contained but two objects, the one is himself, and the other the means, which subserve his pleasure. Imagine him in the world without the power of indulging himself, and you must imagine a forlorn bankrupt—a starving beggar—a crippled cast-away, flung by the sea upon a barren beach. Now, to live in pleasure, thus, is to give the strongest evidence, that one well can give, that he is living under the dominion of a selfish, a carnal, a worldly, a sensual mind, that he is enslaved by what the Scriptures call “evil concupiscence;” or fleshy lusts; that his character,

tastes, and appetites, are all in conflict with the requirements of religion.

And, so, the Bible condemns him, and says of him, "he is dead while he liveth." He is dead while he liveth, because in the first place, his life is barren of all those fruits, those results, which the life of such a being as man, is required by his constitution, to produce. The fig-tree, that was found without fruit, in the Savior's parable, was at length, directed by the proprietor, to be cut down. Why? because the object for which it was planted was, that it might bear fruit, and after an abundant experiment of the likelihood of its accomplishing its object, it was found without fruit, so that all the reasons for its continuing in existence had ceased, and to suffer it to remain was only to cumber the ground. While it lived it was no better than a dead tree. Put a man in the position of that tree, and it would be right to say of him, he is no better than a dead man. He was made and organized to serve certain purposes in the world. He is not serving those purposes. His existence, so far as they are concerned, is a blank, and his existence therefore is not to be taken account of. He is as good as dead. Suppose you asked for a stream of water to be introduced into your farm, that, as it wandered here and there in its channels, it might irrigate your fields, and bathe the roots of your orchards, and infuse fertility into your meadows. And suppose in the place of what you asked, you should see a fountain springing up somewhere in your lands, cleaving the air with its sparkling column, glittering, dancing in the sunbeams, as it rose to its elevation, and then dissolving into drops and falling back again, in a shower, into the basin from which it issued, absorbing, so to speak, in its own bosom, all the energy, all the vitality, it had sent forth. You would say, "I asked not for this." For the purposes I had in view, this thing, pretty, graceful to be

seen, but utterly useless, this thing is not worth the space it occupies. Away with it. I do not want it.' Now man was made to be the stream, not the fountain, in this world of ours. His life is intended to flow outward, not inward. He has no right to expend upon himself the forces with which he has been endowed. He has no right to take counsel only of his own inclinations and passions, as to the manner in which he shall employ his existence. He has no right to say, "such and such things will give me pleasure, and such and such things, therefore, I will do." There are many other questions he ought to ask about these things, besides the one, whether in his opinion, they will give him pleasure, before he can feel authorized to do them. Are they a part of that work, which by the laws of reason, nature and God, it was indicated to him that he was made and placed in the world to do? Will he by doing these things be qualifying himself to give up that account which he is bound to render to his Maker, of his stewardship? Will he be able, if he spends his life in such occupations, to show upon the review of it, that it was not given to him in vain? For God, we may be sure, makes nothing in vain, and least of all did he make such a being as man in vain. He had a purpose in making him, and that purpose it is man's great duty to realize and fulfill. You do not cut and polish and set your pearls, to cast them before swine. You use them as the adornments of human beauty and grandeur. Neither did God cut and polish and set in your nature, those pearls that stud, so to speak, every department of your soul and body, that they might be cast before swine, or be trampled in the mire of swinish pursuits and indulgences. He meant them to be used for the developing and perfecting of the being to whom they had been entrusted, and ultimately, for the magnifying of his own glory. And before you ask of any occupation whether it is

going to give you pleasure, you must ask whether it is going to produce such results as these, whether it is going to put the pearl under the swine's foot, or light with it a man's brow and the crown of God. If it does not do this latter, you had better abandon the occupation and do without the pleasure, for to be living in such pleasure, is assuredly, to be dead while you live. The pursuit of pleasure, in every case where it diverts men from the great objects of life—the advancement of their nature; the improvement of the world, of the organism of which, every individual is an active and responsible part; and the illustration of the glory of God—in every case where it has the effect of diverting men from these, the pursuit of pleasure is making their lives barren of the fruits, which they ought to produce, and so, is demonstrating that as to all the purposes contemplated in their creation, they are dead.

And then, in the next place, he that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth, because his mode of life involves in it, a perpetual consummation and waste of what may be called, the true vital power of his nature. You all know the effect of mortification, when it sets in, in any part of the diseased human body. It is corruption—anticipating the departure of life. It is a token that the subject is dead, while he is yet living. It may be a startling remark to make, and yet there is a wonderful degree of similarity in the cases, that seems to warrant the remark, that the lust of pleasure in the heart (selfish, sensual, worldly pleasure, of course, I mean,) is just like this mortification in the body. It is corruption begun, a disorganizing element at work upon the moral system of the subject, a fearful sign that he is in a moribund state, an incipient stage of death. There are men to be found, the wretched, shameless, hopeless drunkard, for instance, who have spent their lives in what they have thought, pleasure, who are nothing

better than living corpses, and corpses that have progressed even to putrefaction. This horrible result reached in some cases shows how terribly the words of the text may be verified. There is danger that they may be similarly verified in all cases, where men live in pleasure. For living in pleasure is not only a wrong mode of living, but it is certain, if pursued long enough, to put it out of the power of the individual ever to adopt a right mode of living. There is such a consumption, or waste of vital power, involved in indulgence in pleasure, that the person ultimately becomes incapable of returning to that true life that consists of the practice of virtue and piety. The gratification of an evil lust, uniformly gives intensity and strength to that lust, so that, by and by, it comes to hold the nature of the man with the tenacity of a death-grip. It is in his heart like the element of mortification, ineradicable, incurable, expelling completely the vital power, as far as it has progressed. A life of pleasure is a life given up to the domination of such evil lusts, and if their tendency is always opposed to the development and perfection of the true life of such a being as man, whenever they have gained that degree of power over him, as assuredly they may, which shall render him incapable of escaping from their domination, that he shall be incapable of correct perceptions and volitions and of self-denial and self-control, then, it will be necessary to write his epitaph, as it were, and say of him, "he is dead while he liveth."

And then, in the third place, he that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth, because his life, as it is a life of sin against God, is only a prelude and a preparation for eternal death. It is death in the seed, sprouting up, shooting forth, maturing, ripening steadily, into death in the fruit. That kind of life which, at every step, is separating the individual farther and farther from God, is certainly

fabricating, as plainly as cause ever fabricated, effect, its issue in his eternal separation from God. And when, like the rich man we read about, who, after living in pleasure, "died and lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment." he from the world of woe, shall measure the awful chasm which separates him from God, he will have to confess, "it is just here my own steps have brought me. I stretched the line, with my own hand, which now measures the extent of my banishment from God." The first step and the last step, the starting point and the termination of an evil course, are elementary parts of one progress. They are united in the unity of the result, so that if the ending is death, the beginning was death; and so, if a life of pleasure must end in death, it begins in death, it goes on in death; and the person who is leading it, may be said at any stage in his career to be in death.* He is still dead even while he liveth. That such a life persevered in, must end in death is the plain and constant declaration of the Scriptures. "The wages of sin," it says, "is death." "Sin, when it is finished," that is when it comes to its issue, "bringeth forth death." And anticipating this result, and applying the terms, which describe its final stages, to the earlier stages of the sinner's course, it says again, "to be carnally-minded is death;" and again, "he that sinneth against me," that is the wisdom or the religion of which Christ was the expositor and revealer, "wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death." Destined to death in its ending, to eternal separation from God, whose favor is the fountain of the soul's life, what can a life of sinful pleasure be, but a perpetual dying? a continual advance into the darkness and horror of the tomb? a treasuring up unto one's self, day by day, and hour by hour, of wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?

And now, do you tell me that this is a harsh doctrine? That it is unjust and intolerable, to be told that to be living in pleasure is to be dead in such senses as these? And is it harsh, and unjust, and intolerable in God not to permit you to set up your will above his, to gratify yourselves at the expense of his rights, his authority, his honor? Harsh, and unjust, and intolerable in him to tell you, that if you will turn away from the object, the pure pleasure he offers you, the pleasure which religion gives, and which in its nature is allied to his own infinite blessedness, and spend your lives pursuing a pleasure which perverts every gift of your nature from its proper use and design, and too often, sinks that nature into fellowship with the brute or the devil, he will be angry with you, and lay his rod upon you in holy severity? No, my friends, no. You may persuade yourselves so, now, but you will think differently sometime, when removed from the temptation and fascination of your pleasures, in the honest reflections of the eternal world, or perhaps, in the often equally honest ones of a dying hour, you estimate the worth of these pleasures aright, and discover all the fearful wrong you have done by them to your own soul and to God.

But why wait for these forlorn occasions to teach you the truth? Believe God's word now! Take that solemn declaration, "he that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth." and gaze at it and study its meaning, as Belshazzar did the fiery writing on his palace walls, and be warned by it, to escape, while you can, the doom of those it describes! You may have already advanced far in the way of guilty pleasure. Then, turn, now, before you have taken the last step, and retreat becomes impossible! You may be just meditating an adventure into the way. Then hear God's voice and turn from it, as you would from the descent to hell! "Surely in vain," says the wise man, "the

net is spread in the sight of any bird." God to-day, has opened your eyes and directed your sight, to see the net spread for your souls. That net is the net of pleasure. Oh, surely you will not, with your eyes open, walk into it! Surely for this mess of pottage, you will not, deliberately, sell your birthright of immortality! This is God's warning, and this is God's hope, concerning you. And now, let me say to you, if you disregard God's warning, and disappoint his hope, if you persist in following your courses of wicked pleasure, you will perish in your sins and your blood will be forever on your own heads.



INCREASE OF FAITH.

JULY 20, 1856.

“And the Apostles said unto the Lord, increase our Faith.”
—LUKE 17:5.

THE excellency and desirableness of Faith as an attribute of character, or grace of the heart, is one of the topics prominently suggested to us by this text. In praying, “increase our faith,” it is implied that the Apostles were in possession, to some extent, of that which they wished to possess in larger measure.

They had made some attainments in Faith, and desired now to advance to higher degrees in the experience and practice of it. It must have been their conviction then, that Faith was good and profitable. Their prayer was the strongest possible expression of such a conviction.

For it is only that which men believe to be a genuine and positive benefit, that they are found anxious (after experiment is made) to retain in their possession, or to possess in an augmented quantity. We are naturally led, in view of such a decided testimony by the Apostles, as to the excellency and desirableness of Faith, to inquire into the grounds upon which their estimate of it is founded, and the extent to which the qualities affirmed of it by them are true. And in order to do this, it will be necessary to go back and inquire, first, what is Faith? The radical idea contained in the meaning of the term is, trusting and believing. We have faith, whenever we trust or believe in a thing so as to treat it as though it were actually what it

professes to be; and as though it were actually about to do what it has promised, or threatened to do. Perhaps we shall define it as correctly and as tersely as may be, by saying, it is that which makes facts of things which are not present and cognizable to us as facts. For instance, the flood was not a fact, present and cognizable prior to the time of its actual coming. When it did actually come, it became such a fact. It became a matter of sense. There was no occasion for the exercise of faith in regard to it then. But, before it came, it was a fact to Noah—a fact which he took into consideration, and estimated and consulted as carefully as he did any other fact, or he would not have spent the time and labor which we know he did spend, upon the building of the ark. Now it was faith which thus made a fact of the flood, before it became actually a fact to Noah. Then further, as faith is concerned thus about things not present and cognizable as facts, it must of course receive its information concerning the things which it makes facts, from some external source. It must take the testimony of some witness, and give credit to that, and upon the ground of that, proceed to act in reference to the things proposed to it. Noah's faith was founded upon a revelation made to him by God of his purpose to send a flood upon the earth. Faith in all cases has a similar foundation. It is confidence exercised in obedience to evidence. It is treating a thing as being what it professes to be, in consequence of a persuasion produced by some kind of proof that it is what it professes to be. Faith, therefore, presupposes testimony, as that upon which its existence depends. And it finds its field of action in giving the force of facts to the things (not present and cognizable as facts) which the testimony reveals. But it is of the faith which is allied to religion that we are particularly to speak.

And applying the remarks I have now made, we may define this faith as being a trusting or believing in the things communicated to us by the testimony of the Scriptures, so as to treat these things as facts though they are not present nor cognizable to us as facts. I say communicated to us by the Scriptures, because these are our main source of information in regard to the things which constitute and form religion. Other witnesses there are such as nature and reason, but the testimony of these is coincident with and embraced in that of the Scriptures. It is all gathered up and repeated in their enunciations, so that if we receive the Scriptures we have the benefit of whatever has been communicated by other sources. Now, the value of faith, is to be measured by the value of those things communicated by Scriptures, which it makes facts. If these are important, and if the possession of them is an advantage, and if they cannot be dispensed with without loss and harm, then faith is important; and the possession of it is an advantage; and it cannot be dispensed with without loss and harm. Faith, for example, makes God a fact. If it is of benefit to a man to have God for a fact, it is of benefit to him to have faith. Faith is excellent and desirable, just as the belief in a God, and a reverential acknowledgment of Him are excellent and desirable. Faith is excellent and desirable just in proportion as Atheism is pernicious and deplorable. So we may take all of the other things included in the revelation of the Scriptures, and assuming as we now do, that they are true, we may say, that just in proportion to the magnitude and importance of these things, is the value of the faith by which they are made to have the effect of facts upon us. Let these things be blotted out from the world—let the doctrines, for instance, of the immortality of the soul, of the accountability of man, of Heaven and hell, of redemp-

tion and sanctification, be dropped into oblivion and what a fearful extinction of man's dearest interests and highest hopes would be the consequence! How would the sun be darkened, and the stars fall to the earth, and chaos rush in again to welter in the abyss which their removal had made!

Yet this is what must occur, if faith cease to act; if faith cease to make facts of these things. You have the alternative always set before you, faith, or the absence from the world, and the soul of man, of all those beneficent agencies, those elevating, purifying, sweetening influences which emanate from the truths of the Christian Scriptures. Religion itself becomes but a shadow of a shade, without faith; for faith gives it its foundation and its substance. Conscience derives its vitality and energy from faith. A want of faith in any man is at once evidence that the moral sense of the man is disordered, and corrupted. An eye that does not see beauty where beauty is, or that takes light for darkness, is not a sound eye. It is an evil eye. So, a soul that has no faith, that is, that does not receive and relish and use as facts, the things which the Scriptures make known to us, must be in a disordered condition. It is a subject of moral corruption. It is not in a right state. To say in one's heart; for instance, "there is no God," is to prove one's self, in the language of the Bible, a fool. It is more than to exhibit ignorance of a fact; it is to exhibit a perverse disposition of mind—a repugnance and contrariety of taste and sentiment to a thing embodied in a fact. It is to be so degraded in the scale of our moral conception, propensities, and sympathies, as to be willing to have God annihilated, and to live without such a Being. Hence unbelief and sin are always classed together in the Scriptures. A heart of unbelief is an evil heart. Faith and a sound moral sense must go together. In illustration of this, we have only to look at the connection in which the

prayer of the Apostles in our text occurs. In the two preceding verses, the Savior had been teaching them the duty of forgiving a trespassing brother. This duty is a hard one at all times; but when urged to the degree, and with the latitude He gave it—when put in such form as this—“if he trespass against thee seven times in a day and seven times in a day turn again to thee saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him,” it seemed tenfold more hard than usual.

It seemed as if a deeper sense of the authority of God, a more commanding tone and attitude on the part of conscience, would be required than in ordinary circumstances to enable them to obey. And in order that they might get these and that they might be animated and strengthened to perform this hard duty—what do they do? They pray for an increase of faith! More faith would bring with it, they seem to argue, moral conviction and determination, and the capacity to see the rectitude of the Divine law, and the power to carry into execution its requirements which were demanded by the difficult injunction imposed upon them by their Master. To enable them to perform the act of forgiveness under peculiarly trying circumstances, they betake themselves to prayer for an increase of faith; and with good reason.

Faith is the principle of obedience to a Divine law. For faith brings the authority of the Divine law to bear on the mind, and it opens the apprehensions of the mind, at the same time, to the demands of the Divine law. Joseph is tempted to transgress, but repels successfully the temptation, and how? By reasoning thus: How can I do this great wickedness and “sin against God?” Conscience kept him from the snare that had been laid for him; and conscience did it because faith told him that the indulgence in the act proposed would be regarded as an offence against himself by God. Faith keeps thus always that terrible

phrase—"Sin against God"—written, so to speak, before the eyes of the world; and so, keeps conscience before the eyes of the world; and so, keeps conscience at work, and informed, and active, in pointing the eyes of the world to it. It is its office peculiarly to make the Divine law saying: "thou shalt," or "thou shalt not do this thing," a fact. And then, it sustains a similarly important relation to the intellect. It acts as a purveyor of material upon which that department of our nature depends, mainly, for its health and vigor, as well as for its efficiency and enjoyment.

Faith opens the avenues of knowledge. It ushers the soul into the contemplation of a new world—a vast and glorious universe lying beyond and above the regions of matter and sense. It feeds and stimulates the mind; it enriches and adorns it by imparting to it information of the most interesting and salutary sort, and in the largest measure, and such as can be derived from no other source. It is the telescope bringing to light orbs and systems such as were never dreamed of by the mind, under the teachings of the natural organs of observation. And it corrects the apprehensions and judgments of the intellect in other cases where it does not communicate knowledge of something new. Many an object seen through the medium of faith, puts on a different aspect entirely from that which it wore when looked at through the medium of sense and reason. Tribulation and temptation, for instance, what repulsive ideas these words excite. Who would consent to them; who would tolerate them, in the guise in which they appear to an ordinary observer? And yet, we hear the Scriptures speak of glorying in tribulation, and "counting all joy to fall into temptation." This paradoxical state of mind as it seems at first view, is the result of the demonstration which faith makes, by which tribulation and temptation are seen to be instruments of moral discipline, and purgation, which,

although painful in their operation, and often abhorrent in their outward incidents, are still most useful in their effects; and are connected with issues so delightful and precious, that the mind looks beyond the means to the end, and can be said even to glory in the one and to count all joy to fall into the other.

And faith again acts as a prominent and potent guide to the affections. They follow its attractions, or are forced into exercise by its propulsion. "With the heart" (and the heart is the seat of the affections) "man believeth" is a scriptural expression; and although it is not to be taken as a metaphysical canon (for it was not given as such), yet it states a truth which is almost universal, and invariable, and so entitled to be called a metaphysical canon. Faith and love in the common notions of mankind are so intermingled that they seem to be but different sides of one and the same sentiment. Where love is, faith is at the bottom of it; and when faith is lost, love departs with it. The direction which any man's affections will take, the force and temperature of them, the class of objects upon which they will fix themselves, will be determined by his faith. The Bible says, "love not the world, nor the things of the world." Again, "set your affections upon things above." Here are two different spheres and modes in which the affections may be employed. None shall decide in which of the two, in any particular case, they shall be employed. It will be the individual's faith. According as the world and things of the world, on the one side, and the things above, on the other side, are looked at and estimated by him as the facts which they are represented as being in the Scriptures, will the result be whether he shall choose and pursue the one or the other; that is, whether his affections shall be given to the one or the other. It is evident, therefore, that we must assign to faith a very conspicuous

and a very influential position in the economy of rational life. We may say of it that it holds the helm of the soul, and acts as the arbiter of destiny. Its agency touches any faculty, and covers any department of man's complicated organism. It establishes the condition upon which the conscience, the intellect, and the affections generally, perform parts, and take their courses and characters. It, in fact, determines in such cases what the man is, and what he is to be; for the conduct and its fruits are, after all, with every man, but the expression of what he really has believed. The right kind of faith—that which the faith of religion must be—such a faith as the Apostles prayed for in the text, is, therefore, a matter to be desired, and to be counted as superlatively excellent. Now, this is the first thought brought to our attention by the text; and the second, seems to be this, that faith, desirable and excellent as it is, essential to religion, both in its inception and growth, as it is, is not always possessed in an adequate measure by religious persons. The Apostles pray, "increase our faith." They wanted more of it; not merely because it was in its nature good and profitable, but because they needed more of it to enable them to carry out the obligations which their religion imposed upon them. They had not all the faith which the exigencies of their position demanded. Some, they had, but not enough; they come therefore with the petition, "increase our faith." To the same effect, we hear the Savior say to them on another occasion, "O! ye of little faith," and we read in the Scriptures of a "weak" faith, a "failing" faith, a faith that is lacking, and a faith that is growing; expressions which all indicate the possibility and the frequency of the fact of faith being possessed by men (who professedly have it) in an imperfect degree. It is no uncommon thing, I suspect, for an increase of faith to be needed by the followers of the Lord Jesus.

The prayer of the disciples, presented when he was on earth, is a prayer which his disciples, ever since his ascent to heaven, have probably had just as much occasion to use. A most impressive prediction that this would be the case, he has left upon record, in that place in Luke's gospel, where he asks the question, "When the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" If the works, according to the rule laid down by St. James, are the proof of faith, and the measure of faith, then the works of Christians being taken into view at any period, or at any spot, the conclusion would be adopted, it is to be feared, without a moment's hesitation, that a defective faith was a fault patent among them universally. Their works are not in all points what faith would make them. More faith would make better works—better both in quality and quantity. And you have rightly explained the defects and inconsistencies, the blemishes and deformities, which you have detected as you have cast your eye over the church, when you have said, "there is too little faith in the church." Take, for instance, those social duties which grow out of the relations of man to his neighbor (of which an example is given us in the context in the forgiving of the trespasses of a brother), and how differently should we see them discharged, if Christians had the faith which they ought to have! "If thy brother trespass against thee in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Is this the rule which we ordinarily see religious persons follow?

Are they as free from resentment and malice, and as full of kindness and forbearance as this kind of conduct would imply? Alas, no! Christians are seen to quarrel, to harbor anger, to indulge in revenge, to go to law, to chafe passionately under a wrong, and contend fiercely for a right, just like those persons who make no pretensions to being

Christians. Not all of them of course; nor often perhaps to the same extent, as these latter persons, but still, too many of them and to too great a degree, to be at all consistent with the difference which the Gospel teaches, there is between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. Faith has failed to act here, or has lost its power, or these things would not be so. The rule of the Scriptures is plain; and conscience adopts and applies the rule of Scripture when it is perceived. If the rule had been permitted to reach and inform the conscience, in other words, if it had been seen and acknowledged intelligently to be the law of God the conduct of the party would have been different. It would have been what the Gospel requires. An increase of faith would have made a bolder and a more enlightened conscience. It would have brought the authority of God to sustain more distinctly these social duties, and they would have been performed. It would have given the force and weight of a fact to the law of God, and it would have had to be recognized by such treatment as is due to a fact. It would not have been evaded or ignored. It would not have been set aside or overlooked any more than a fact in nature would.

Again we shall conclude that an imperfect faith exists amongst Christians if we look at the extreme interest they seem to take in the things of this world, and the faint impression they seem to carry with them, of a future one, for which this is designed to be preparatory. The Scriptures draw a map, so to speak, of life which is peculiar to themselves. It contains a region, nay, the greater part of it, by far, is occupied by a region which has no place at all in the maps of life which uninspired authors have made. This region is the eternity which stretches away beyond the horizon of time. The Christian professes to see this eternity in the map by which he is guided in his march through life as

clearly as he does the countries which are present to him, and through which he is actually passing. If this is the fact, he will of course, compare the future with the present as one fact is compared with another, and he will assign the due importance and value to each; and not act towards either so as to contradict the existence of the other. He will not become such a spiritualist as to deny his relations to the present world, nor will he on the other hand, become such a sensualist (if I may use the term) as to deny his relations to an invisible eternity, and disregard the obligations of looking after his well-being in the future world. If eternity is nothing to him practically, if his course in the present world is not in any degree modified or controlled by it, it is because he really does not believe in any eternity. He has no faith in such a world. If he had, it would tell upon his policy, and treatment towards the present world. Where Christians are seen absorbed with temporal matters, with their whole heart filled with the things of this life, its cares, its pleasures, its gains and its honors, it is evidence, that their faith is defective.

The same thing is indicated by a want of zeal and effort, on the part of religious people, for the diffusion of religion, or what we ordinarily call the conversion of men. The Scriptures affirm things of men in their natural condition which, if they be facts, are adapted to fill every benevolent mind with solicitude for them; and to lead to a most earnest endeavor to bring them out of their natural condition, into a better one. Now, faith makes these things facts to those who possess it. They are credited by such persons—received as true—and they must have an effect upon the feelings and actions of these persons. They must make them sympathize with those whom their faith leads them to regard as in the extreme of peril and misery, and yearn over them with affectionate longing for their salva-

tion. And where such indications of true Christian philanthropy are wanting the inference is reasonable and unavoidable, that these persons are lacking in faith. And the same defect is made apparent again by the conduct of religious parents in reference to their children. A very important branch of the stewardship with which God has entrusted his people consists in the nurture and tutelage of children. A wide field of Christian duty lies in this direction. The education of a child is something with which faith necessarily has much to do. Faith will make many things facts in regard to the child which will have an important bearing upon the system of training to which it is subjected by the parent or teacher. It cannot be educated for the world merely, when faith has demonstrated that it was made principally for another one. It cannot be taught that any selfish end is the object for which it is to struggle and labor, when faith has made known the obligation which binds it to live to the glory of God. And, when persons professing to be believers in the Gospel are seen rearing their families for this world, adjusting their education exclusively to conditions and results connected with the present state, as if they had no interest in any state beyond, we are forced to conclude that faith must have become very weak, or ceased to act at all, in reference to this great department of Christian duty. Now these signs indicating an inadequate measure of faith in those who exhibit them are common enough, to make us confess that the occasion for the prayer of the text is one which is by no means of rare occurrence. The disciples every where may come as the twelve did of old, and beg their Master to increase their faith; for there is no question that there is a demand for a vastly larger amount than exists in the church.

And this leads me to the third topic suggested by the text; and this is that Faith is something which is bestowed

by God in answer to prayer. It is one of those spiritual gifts which He, the sovereign author of grace, dispenses. When we have proved the excellency and desirableness of it, and then have shown that, in point of fact, there is a great want, or a great insufficiency of faith existing in the religious world, we have demonstrated the necessity of a resort to some measures for an immediate increase of faith. And here, the text tells us what we must do, and where we must look. Not denying the importance and utility of all those efforts for the revival and invigoration of faith which man himself can employ, we are taught that it is from God absolutely, that we are still to expect and seek the blessing. "Faith is the gift of God," distinctly says the Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians, and in a hundred other places in the New Testament it is spoken of in the same way. Spite of all that man can do, without the agency of the Holy Spirit, true faith can never be generated in the soul, for it is one of the fruits of the spirit expressly named. There must be the same kind of application made, and to the same source, as there was in the case of the Apostles. The prayer of the earnest heart longing for the benefit, must bear the petition to the throne of grace. "Lord increase our faith." This is a point of great importance. God will be honored in the dispensation of spiritual blessings. Man can have nothing which he does not receive and for which he does not give God glory. And he who strives to make the acquisition of any grace independently of his aid will be disappointed. He opened the heart of Lydia, that she believed the things reported to her; and so, he must do with every other heart; not to the exclusion of natural rational efforts on the part of the individual; but in connection with such efforts put forth in the spirit of humble self-distrust, which looks all the while away from the effort, and relies upon the agency of Him

whom prayer can reach, and who has said "My grace is sufficient for you."

And now let me say in conclusion, no serious-minded person among you, who has gone far into the world, or been associated long with it, can have failed to be painfully impressed with the conviction, that there is a great and general lack of faith amongst this generation. The age through which we have been passing, has been emphatically a carnal age. A bold, inquisitive, and irreverent age. It has little docility or meekness. It is conceited and arrogant. It is secular and sordid. It is materialistic and utilitarian. It is a busy age, one that is making the most possible of the present. So much indeed that it hardly cares to hold on to the past at all; and has hardly leisure to glance, even cursorily at the future. God's word is in great danger of being laid aside, as an obsolete statute-book in such an age. Eternity is liable to be classed with the dreams of poets. Motives drawn from a future life, from relations to God, from principles of abstract morality and truth, are likely to be discarded as wire-drawn subtillies, too intangible to be heeded by practical men. And religion is likely to congeal into a frigid formalism, or evaporate into an airy sentimentalism, under the operation of the sinister influences to which it is, on these accounts, exposed. Our age wants faith; such faith as our ancestors had—the faith that makes little children of men, and so produces candidates for the kingdom of God. We have all been living too much under the sway of sense, under the power of the flesh, and too little under the guidance of faith, and under the control of the spirit. Look into your religious condition, my Christian friends, and see if this is not so! You want more faith, or else, let me tell you, you have far too much. If your faith is right, then you want more of it. For if the things it makes facts, are verities, then you

do not realize, or believe them half enough. They are not having half the influence over your characters and lives that they are entitled to have. But if they are not verities, if your faith is a delusion, then I say, you have far too much. It is a pity to suffer the thralldom to error (partial though it may be), which you are now enduring. But this you do not admit. Your faith is not vain. The Scriptures are the infallible word of God. They are the world's great Ararat of Truth, where the soul reposes in the only harbor which offers it anchorage, in which is all else a fathomless ocean; and they cannot be relinquished. Your only wise course, your obvious duty, then, is to get more faith, or to let the faith you nominally hold, become an active, living principle, so that the fruit shall correspond with the tree, or the man shall be the fit exemplar of his creed. If your faith is worth having at all, you want more of it. You want it for your own soul's sake, for the sake of the generation whose conversion you are appointed to seek, for the sake of your Father in Heaven, who has commanded you to let your light so shine in the world, that others seeing your good works may be lead to glorify Him. If the doctrines and precepts of your religion do not deserve to be embraced completely and lived up to, to the letter, they had better be abandoned altogether, for they are only a yoke upon your necks, to gall you at every motion you make. A Christian ever condemned by half his creed is the most miserable of men; finding rest no where; drawing confidence and satisfaction from neither world. You want a faith that shall leave no article of your creed to condemn you; which shall show that you are treating everything which the creed contains as a fact, and giving to it the attention and value which such a fact deserves. And this faith, as the Apostle John says, will be your victory. It will make you free and triumphant; rejoicing in the liber-

ty of the Spirit of God. Let me exhort you, my Christian friends, to make this prayer of the Apostles, your own. An increase of faith, a clearer sense of eternal and divine things, a deeper feeling of God's presence, and the Savior's love, a living light and power imparted to the Scriptures, and a conviction of the truth of the revelation shining in the soul with the vividness and glory of sunlight; these are benefits comprised in the blessings; and these are what we must have, if we would not forfeit, like the slothful servant who buried his talent (the grace already bestowed), and put ourselves in peril of sharing at last, the portion of hypocrites and unbelievers.



FINDING THE MESSIAS.

(SACRAMENTAL.)

JUNE 5, 1852.

“He first findeth his own brother, Simon, and saith unto him, we have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”—JOHN 1:41

IT is evident from this remark of Andrew to his brother, that it was a matter of common faith amongst the Jews, that a personage whom they were accustomed to conceive of under the title of the Messias, or “Anointed one,” was sometime to appear amongst them. From the highest to the lowest, from the High Priest at Jerusalem to the woman of Samaria, and the fishermen of Galilee, the expectation of such a personage pervaded the nation. And the coming of this Messias, they regarded as possible at any time. Especially, we have reason to believe, about the period of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, they were led to look for him. Many, like Simeon, were “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and were entertaining the confident persuasion that “they should not see death before they had seen the Lord Jesus Christ.” Hence Andrew’s positive announcement “we have found the Messias” does not seem to have struck Peter’s mind as anything strange or improbable. The ideas which prevailed amongst the people as to who this expected personage was to be, and what offices he was to perform, were probably very various. They all agreed in one point, however, that he was to be a deliverer, or one who should redeem Israel from some

or all of the evils, under which they were suffering. Amidst the manifold wrongs and miseries with which his nature was burdened no Jew could fail to see something which seemed to demand the presence of the Messiah, and which made his coming an object of eager anticipation. Now, in a certain sense—and not a very equivocal one, either—this posture of the Jewish nation, in reference to an expected Messiah, was only the type of that in which the whole world was standing. For, what does history teach us but that the world has since been filled and agitated with some great hope and expectation of a Redeemer who should raise it out of all actual disorder and wretchedness into an ideal state of blessedness and security? A mighty travail, we may say, has been always going on in the earth, the fruit of which has been waited for as the earth's Savior. The Jews, taught and guided by the Scriptures, knew what it was for which they were yearning, but the Gentile nations, unaided by such a light, yearned in darkness, for a good which they could not define. But, nevertheless, they did yearn; and have always yearned. They have always been dreaming amidst their burdens and chains, of a Divine Redeemer who should yet be given to them; and they have been ready to give utterance to their faith whenever some eminent benefactor has appeared amongst them, as the people of Lystra did when they cried out when they saw a cripple miraculously healed by Paul, "the Gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." The vision of a golden age to come, when the earth, relieved of its woes, shall mirror in its happiness the beauty and bliss of heaven, has never ceased to float before their minds. And as sage after sage, and hero after hero has arisen, they have gathered around him, expecting that under his potent ministry the auspicious epoch would begin. "Men," says an eminent English writer, "have nowhere acquiesced in the world's

evil or the world's law. Everywhere they have had a tradition of a time when they were nearer to God than now, —a confident hope of a time when they should be brought nearer again. Through all the world's history has run the hope of a redemption from the evil which oppresses it; and this hope has continually linked itself on to some single man. Weak and helpless in themselves, the generations of men have evermore been looking after one in whom they may find all which they seek vainly in themselves and in those around them—redemption of the world's wrong—delivery from the world's yoke—vindication of the honor of the race—souls of heroic stature, in whom all the features that are imparted with a niggard hand unto others shall be found gloriously and prodigally combined. Such, in almost every religion, men have learned to look back to as having already come—such we find that they are everywhere expecting as yet to appear.” In a word, the world has always been hoping and waiting for its Messiah. And to come down to man, as an individual, might not these same terms and expressions be used, truly, to describe his condition everywhere? Is he not always watching and longing for something which shall give him what he needs and make him what he ought to be? Is not his inquiry all his life-long, “who will show us any good?” Who will be our Messiah? Our Prophet to teach us what our minds want to know? Our Priest to deliver our conscience from their sense of guilt and their fears? Our King to support us and protect us from our enemies? There is no man who takes an intelligent survey of his state naturally but is conscious of evils in it for which he needs relief. And the soul, when its movements are rightly interpreted, is ever struggling through one channel or one device or another, to find this relief. Crippled and embarrassed and knowing itself to be wrong, and yet not knowing how to get right,

feeling itself to be really famishing and yet not knowing what will fully satisfy it—it is forever out of its ruin, more or less, articulately lifting up its cry for a helper. Like the sick man conscious that a mortal disorder is lurking and spreading in his system—it ceaselessly implores the presence of a physician, or spends the little strength it can command in searching for the charm, or the herb, or the spring by whose potent virtue it may expel its maladies and gain health and life. Now the explanation of this dissatisfaction which keeps mankind struggling and aspiring after a better state than that which they find themselves in, when we come to the bottom of the matter is that they are estranged from God. Their proper relations with him are interrupted; and hence they have lost the true centre of rest. The world is out of order; and the soul out of order, just because it is standing out of its proper position and bearing in regard to God—its head, and source and support and end. A wicked world must be a distrusted and unhappy world; and a wicked soul must be an uneasy, dissatisfied soul. “There is no peace to the wicked,” is the utterance of Eternal Wisdom, and it has been written as a law upon the pillars of the universe. For any world or any soul to be independent of God and yet be complete in itself and in its condition, so as to be conscious of no want and no loss, would be for God to admit another kingdom into his own, or to tolerate in his dominion a power that would be foreign to himself. Loyalty to him; in his creatures, would cease to be of any value since the rebel would stand on the same ground as the faithful subject. Evil and good would lose the distinction that ought to separate them. And thus he who should say to evil, “be thou very good,” would find himself as wise in his choice and as sure of his happiness, as the pure spirit who should keep himself as spotless as Gabriel in his virtue. The connection then between the

apostacy of a world or soul from God, or in other words, between sin in the world or soul, and dissatisfaction and want and misery, is a fixed matter, an ordinance of God, as certain and unchangeable, as his own sovereignty, or his own holiness. And it is because of the rupture which apostacy or sin has made between our world and each individual man of our race and God—that this spectacle of ceaseless unrest and dissatisfaction—and this cry for a deliverer, a helper to come and relieve what is disorderly and heal what is diseased and supply what is wanting is evermore going up. The demand is for one who shall bind together again the broken tie, who shall restore the severed harmony between heaven and earth,—who shall upon the basis of a new covenant bring God and man into fellowship again, so that the relations which at first subsisted between them, when man was the godlike tenant of an Eden-world and the Lord walked with him as friend with friend, shall be re-established. And to do this work and meet this demand, must be the office of the world's Messiah. The personage, therefore, must be more than a sage, or hero; more than a founder of a school of philosophy; more than a reformer. He must be one who can stand as a peacemaker between God and man. He must be one who comes from God (for with God must originate the overtures of peace), and who leads man to God; and he must be able to lay a foundation by himself and in himself, upon which all the conditions necessary to peace between God and man shall appear fulfilled, and all the relations implied in a state of peace between them shall be constituted and perpetuated. He must be, in short, just what the term, Messiah, signifies—one anointed, or commissioned by God—and he must be the world's prophet, to teach man his real condition and need, and reveal to him the Divine methods by which it is proposed to save him; and the world's priest, to remove

man's guilt by an atonement of infinite value and so harmonize justice with mercy in the work of salvation; and the world's king, to control and govern all things for the successful accomplishment of man's redemption and for the complete assurance of the laboring and heavy-laden ones, who go to him for rest.

And such a Messiah, Andrew declared to Peter, had at last appeared in the world, in the person of Jesus. In him he recognized the long needed and expected Deliverer, "the desire of all nations" and all souls. And my friends, what has he expressed in his confession but the language and the faith of all God's people, since his day? The very mark of the church, which gives it its peculiarity, and the very central article of its creed and testimony is this, "we have found the Messiah." Our wants have met the object which relieves and satisfies them. Him, for whom man has so long waited and prayed; him for whom the blind world is yet crying with piteous lament, we have found. And over the wide sighing of desire, "O that I knew where I might find him," which comes up, almost like a wail, from the burdened earth, we fling our joyful shout to "he has come, we have found the Messiah!" Yes, my Christian brethren, in Jesus of Nazareth, we have found a Savior for the world, and for that which, to each one of us, is the most important thing in the world—our own souls. To us deliverance from all the evils of sin presents itself, not as a thing to be desired and hoped for, not as a poet's fancy or a dreamer's dream, but as a veritable fact, an actual advent of a Redeemer, in whom all that men have imagined or desired is more than fulfilled. To us Jesus is the Savior. This man who we know (just as we know anything else that depends upon testimony,) has come into and lived upon our earth, we believe, was the Lord's anointed, sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the cap-

tives, and the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound. In the work which he performed we see an ample foundation laid for the restoration of harmony between God and man; and around him, as a nucleus, we see the material gathered which shall make a new creation of this disordered world, and construct out of the chaos that now welters around us a new heaven and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. There is no evil which sin has introduced into man's nature or state for which we do not see the remedy in Christ. There needs but that a soul should come fully under the operation of the powers he has brought into the world to make of it a redeemed soul, and there needs but that a nation should do the same to make of it a redeemed nation. We want, therefore, no better Messiah, and we are deaf to every preacher that announces to us another Savior. While the cry, "to here," or "to there," is ever and anon ringing through the credulous crowds, as some new pretender rises up and promises to heal the world's woes—we calmly look back to Bethlehem and Calvary and say, "the true Messiah has been found—he was born, and died and rose again and lives and reigns in Jesus." And this, brethren, is our distinction as Christians, that whilst others are still, through their unbelief, groping in the dark and chasing the phantoms that cheat them with vain promises of relief, we have been enabled to see and know the Messiah. He came to his own, but they received him not. He is still in the world, but the world will not believe in him. And here is the most amazing and mournful demonstration of the wretchedness in which mankind are involved, that they are so stupified and perverted by sin, that they do not know the helper when he comes to them. The Son of God is among them, and the evil spirits flee before him everywhere, forsaking, at his command, the poor victims of their cruelty; but the infatuated onlookers

refuse to believe it is the Son of God, and seem to say in their folly, "he hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." But we, with happier visions, can discern in him, the tokens of a heavenly birth. To us he is full of grace and truth, the very brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. And we receive him as the Divine Messiah—the God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. And thus it is in a general way, that we have found him. But to understand properly the precious significance there is in this finding the Messiah, let me trace the fact out briefly into a few of its details.

There are times in which our views of Jesus, the Savior, have been peculiarly distinct epochs in our history, when, in some new revelation, we have seemed to find him. Such a time is that when a sense of its sins has been awakened in the soul, when the man has come to see himself in the hands of God's law, and to know himself to be condemned by it in every article, and to feel something of the terribleness there is in the curse which it pronounces upon the guilty. You have all substantially passed through such a time, my brethren. After slumbering, perhaps, for long years, in strange blindness as to spiritual things, insensible to the rights of God, and to your own obligations as his creatures, you have, from some cause, been roused to an intelligent apprehension of your character and condition. And the truth has flashed upon your mind, "I am perishing as surely as there is a God and a judge!" The foundations of your former peace are broken up. Your satisfaction with yourself is gone. Your relish for worldly things is gone. Your ability to beguile yourself of your inward distress by attention to outward business and pleasure is gone. You have become conscious of a want, a need which the world cannot supply, and of a deadly dis-

ease which no creature's skill or power can cure. To remain as you are you know is to be lost, but what shall you do to be saved? How get discharged from the condemnation which your own conscience and the law of God are perpetually thundering in your ears? Perhaps you try yourself to heal up the breach between you and God, laboring by something you can say, as excuse, or do, as merit, to raise a footing upon which you may be able to stand before God. But this is merely to deceive yourself, and you are now too much awake, too sincere and earnest, to consent to be deceived. You feel that every plea you make is a nullity, and every struggle throws you back into despair. At this juncture, when every device of your own has failed, and your darkness has reached its climax, certain passages in the Scriptures, which you have read a thousand times, perhaps, and which, as matters of doctrine, are as familiar to you as your alphabet, begin to come out from the sacred page with unwonted distinctness, and to glimmer with a light, and to fasten themselves with a new power upon your heart. One says, "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus," and another, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" and another and another follow, presenting different terms and the same truth, till the Bible seems to be all full of it, and a bright blazing revelation of a Savior shines before you. The doctrine taught in these passages, as I have said, is familiar, and has been understood by you intellectually, all your lives, but now you see something in it which does more than address the intellect—something which invites the hope and trust and love of the heart. You see in it a life and a power and a mighty personality, capable of being an active helper to you. Emerging from the doctrine as from a dissolving en-

velope, Jesus stands before you. You see him now, not as an abstraction, an idea, but as a real, present Deliverer, and he speaks to you, and touches you, and takes your guilt from you, and lifts you from the despair, into which you had sunk, and says, "be of good cheer, I have redeemed thee. Believe only, and thou shalt live forever." And you do believe. Your whole soul goes out in trust, in this living Savior. And as you trust your sense of danger departs, and in Christ Jesus you rest, as securely as the infant in its mother's arms. And thus you have found the Messiah! The Scriptures have been the field and he has been the treasure hid within it, and you have found him, by faith. You have found him, as "the Lamb of God," to take away your sins, and as "the Lord your righteousness," to procure your justification at the bar of heaven. Such a discovery all true Christians, sometime and somehow, have made. It may not have been a sudden discovery; they may not be able to say when, precisely, it has been made, so gradually has the object opened upon the sight—but without exception, the fact has occurred, that such a discovery has been made. And it is a discovery which involves in it a change from death to life.

This may be said to be the first finding of the Messiah which occurs in the Christian history, but there are others which follow it. You have sometimes felt yourselves, my brethren, on the point of surrendering your fidelity to God. Temptations have beset your soul with unusual violence, and through carelessness or sloth, they have found you off your guard. And while you parley with them, the arguments which conscience urges to keep you from yielding, grow weaker and weaker, and the sinful thing proposed to you, presses its claims, with more and more plausibility, until the result seems inevitable, that your feet must slide. Or your minds, through a neglect of

the proper precautions, have been suffered to fall into a distrustful and disaffected state towards God, so that you question his faithfulness to his promises. You doubt his love; you say it is a vain thing to serve him, and you are almost ready to throw yourself into the labyrinth of scepticism or the abyss of unbelief. Or you have found that the law of Christian consistency has imposed upon you duties which have intimidated your weak spirit. This cross is too heavy, or this mountain too high, or this barrier too strong, you have said, and you have stood trembling in the way, where they have met you, until you have almost concluded that the terms of discipleship were too severe, and your treacherous heart has half entertained the thought of quitting the self-denying road to heaven. You have, in all such cases, felt yourself quivering on the verge of apostasy. You are like the man who has thoughtlessly suffered himself to be caught by a current that flows over a cataract. Roused suddenly to an intelligent apprehension of his position, he finds himself plunging towards the brink, and, paralyzed by the discovery, he feels himself powerless in himself and infallibly doomed to destruction unless a helper shall come to his relief. A moment's delay may seal his ruin. Just such is your condition, and in just such a crisis, planting himself in the midst of this on-rushing army of temptations and doubts and discouragements, Jesus appears to you, as he once appeared amidst the tumult of the winds and waves when the disciples were about to perish on the sea of Galilee, and at his presence an instant reaction in your mind occurs. There is a spontaneous cleaving of the soul to him, and the heart that was just meditating the fatal step that would have separated it from God, now kindles with all its first love, and breaks from the grasp of its betrayers to find safety and assurance and strength in reposing upon Christ. You found the Deliverer

whom you needed in that hour of danger. His timely interposition brought with it the light and demonstration and love, that exposed your tempters in their true guise and dissipated your doubts and filled you with power and courage to brave your hardest duties and keenest trials. And so you were saved, and you have again to record how, in a moment of peril, you found the Messias.

And akin to these, are those seasons of sorrow through which you have passed. It has not been these traitorous tendencies to renounce your loyalty to God which you have been exposed to at such seasons, so much as it has been the disposition to sink down into a mute, motionless apathy; a blank imbecility; a deathlike oblivion of all in the present life that could engage your interest or incite you to exertion or divert you from your woe. You have, most of you, known times, when such a disposition has been the predominant one in your hearts. When the charm of life had fled; when all beauty had faded from the sky; when existence had become a burden, and but one spot drew to it a pleasant longing, and that spot was, the grave. You were a mourner, bereaved of one whose presence had been the joy of your being, or weeping like Rachel for the children that were not, and you walked through a desolate world, with your form robed in sackcloth and with ashes on your head. Human friends poured their consolations into your ears, but the heart within you was stone, and their words could not quicken it. Your soul was with the lost one, and human friends had no power to draw it from the sepulchre. But in this dreary wilderness where you were wandering, Jesus met you, and like Martha and Mary, when they heard that the Master had come, you rushed instinctively to his feet, and his kind voice broke the gloomy spell by which you were bound; and when he said to you, "beloved think it not strange concerning this fiery trial that has tried

you," you saw that it was no strange thing that had happened unto you, and when he reminded you, "the cup that my Father gave me did I not drink it," you found that it was possible even for you to drink a bitter cup from your Father's hand; and when he bade you—cease mourning for the dead's sake, and go and be cheerful and useful and holy for his sake, you could not deny him, but wiped away your tears, and came back with a tranquilized spirit to the scene of your duties. And as often as in after years, you have recalled those days of sorrow, you have had to confess, "there I found the Messiah!"

These illustrations may suffice to explain how it is that this fact, which I have alleged to be the peculiar privilege of Christians, exhibits itself and repeats itself, continually, through the course of his history. And we know that this same fact will characterize his experience to the end. In that great crisis even when everything else, which man values, must be resigned and lost, I mean death, only, a new and perhaps, the best and truest discovery of the Messiah will be made. It was so with Stephen when he died, for the very heavens were opened to show him Jesus, standing at the right hand of God; and David anticipated that it would be so when he should die, for he declared, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

But how imperfect must be all prior discoveries of this kind, to that which awaits the Saint, as he enters heaven! There "we shall see him as he is," writes the Apostle, and in the assurance of this, he declares it to be his desire to depart and be with Christ. Here, it is by faith after all, and through a glass, darkly, that we get our interviews with the Lord; but in heaven, it will be face to face. And then, when every impediment and film that clouds our vis-

ion now, is gone forever, then, as never before, we shall know the precious meaning of the phrase, we have found the Messiah.

But, while we await this final discovery, let us gladly avail ourselves, brethren, of every means by which we may be brought into communion with Christ. As he has commanded us to "abide in him," it becomes us to seek him by a continual process. And so manifold are our needs and so all-sufficient his ability to supply them, that we may be sure we shall never find him without finding a blessing. Some of his disciples found him once, in the breaking of bread, and so we want to find him to-day, to know him and see him and to appropriate him as our Messiah, in the materials of that sacramental feast, which we are to celebrate in remembrance of him. I trust we shall not be disappointed. If we seek, we have his promise that we shall find; and if, with hearts prepared by faith and love, we come to his table and study anew through the teachings of its simple emblems the great mystery of our redemption, it may be the privilege of us all to record as our happy experience that "we have found the Messiah!"



ENDURINGNESS OF GOD'S MERCY.

JANUARY 6, 1861.

“For His mercy endureth forever.”—PSALM 136:1.

THIS inspiring refrain, which closes each verse of this Psalm, may be regarded, from this fact, and from its recurrence frequently in other places in the Old Testament, as a sort of national motto among the Israelites. It was a legend emblazoned on their banners, expressive, at the same time, of the faith and the gratitude of the pious Jew. It enunciates one of the precious truths of revelation, which had been placed in the custody of God's ancient people, and which still forms a part of the heritage of his church. It includes the twofold idea of Mercy, as an attribute of God, and of his possessing it in an inexhaustible degree. This latter fact is to be emphasized. It constitutes the completing element in all good things. It is the golden clasp or circlet which holds in their place a cluster of gems. It assures us, not only that mercy belongs to God, but that it belongs to him inseparably, and without variableness or exhaustion.

The everlasting enduringness of God's mercy is, therefore, the theme which is set before us. Other attributes of God are said to possess the same quality (as his righteousness, and truth), but the nature of the quality, as it exists in these other attributes, is altogether different, so far as man is concerned, from that which belongs to it, in the case of mercy. For mercy is the part or side of Deity, so

to speak, through which alone man can hold contact and communication with God. Mercy is the only point at which man can gain access to Him, and draw benefit from all his other attributes. Take away his mercy and the nature of God, so far as man is concerned, becomes a high and an unapproachable castle, entrenched in impregnable ramparts, and barred at every portal. But let mercy be revealed, and that castle becomes an open refuge, to which man may resort, and within whose walls he may find safety; and let that mercy be proclaimed, as in the text, to be an everlasting mercy, and then this castle becomes not only an open and a safe, but an imperishable and indestructible, refuge—a dwelling-place for the people of God in all generations—a shelter that shall never fail, being destined to survive both the waste of ages and the dissolution of nature. This grand and inspiring truth I propose for your consideration to-day. There is infinite comfort in it. It comes to us like the angels' song, to the shepherds at Bethlehem; or like the notes of a silver bell ringing out sweetly over the clang and tumult of the world.

The watcher of the heavens at night will soon have discovered that the vast concourse of stars that stud the firmament, are in motion. One after another of these shining points, and clusters, will drop towards the Western horizon, and disappear from view, while others climbing their way up the concave from the East, will follow their predecessors in their ceaseless revolution. But in this general change, one tranquil orb will retain its position. The pole-star knows no variation. There it stands forever, the immovable sentinel, guarding the spot, where the axis of the celestial globe is forever turning. And like this in its immobility, is the mysterious little instrument which, at whatever spot on earth you place it, points to the pole-star. Guided by the unerring indications of the magnetic needle,

the pilot will track his way over the world, treading its channels and its seas, and touching at its harbors with the precision with which he would have gone through the streets and allies of his native town, and called at the doors of his familiar friends. Amidst the ever-varying incidents of a voyage, in calm or in storm, in darkness or in light, in every change of climate or atmosphere, under every parallel of latitude and longitude—there stands the faithful monitor, forever instinct with its strange intelligence, unwavering, unceasing in its ministry; and there it will stand, true to its trust, till the last plank is torn from beneath it, and it goes down with the foundering hulk to the caverns of the deep. Like these everlasting things is the mercy of God, in this changeful world of ours. The affairs of the world are ever shifting, and ever moving, like the ever rolling orbs of the sky; and the incidents in the life of each individual, are undergoing perpetual mutations, like those which attend the ship at sea; but, amidst all these revolutions and vicissitudes, the mercy of God, firm as the pole-star, and steady as the mariner's needle, "endureth forever." How pleased to find perpetuity just here! The language of human history is that all things are subject to change and decay. The clouds above us are not more inconstant than the scenes and objects around us. No year leaves us, at its close, in the position in which it found us, at its opening. Childhood is springing up into manhood, manhood is striding on to old age, and old age is creeping downward to the tomb. The wheel of fortune, as we call it, or the cycle of Providence, as it would be better named, is forever rolling round, and, in its restless rotation changing the place and the condition of everything. The high of to-day are the low of to-morrow; and the low of to-day, the high of to-morrow. The strong become the weak, and the weak the strong. The poor grow rich, and the rich

lapse into poverty. Friends wax cold towards each other. The ivy on the grave stone succeeds the garland on the nuptial altar. Love, that yearned in rapture over the first born's cradle, is turned into heart-broken anguish as it lays its treasure in the infant's grave. The track of time is crowded with sepulchral monuments. It is like the passage through which the traveler enters Pompeii, the city of the dead, a street of tombs. Nations become extinct, and strangers, after a thousand years, dig up their relics. Dynasties rise and fall. Customs, languages, religions, waste away and disappear. The present is built upon the ruins of the past; and the future shall be built upon the ruins of the present. Now, in contrast with these dirge-like notes of history, how pleasant to hear the jubilant tones of revelation proclaiming, "the mercy of God endureth forever!" Amidst these tablets in the great cemetery of time, carved each with a broken rose-branch, or the reversed torch—emblems of decay and extinction—how pleasant to see this heaven-wrought column rearing itself, radiant in its purity, bearing all over it the tracery of the immortal amaranth, and lifting from its top the image of an undying flame! This object shall be my theme to-day; and the few thoughts that we can give to it, and lessons we may learn from it, will not be, I trust, without solace and profit to some of you.

"His mercy endureth forever." We will take the word mercy, in its widest and most obvious sense, as meaning the Divine good-will, or benevolence in every form; and the thing affirmed of it, is, that it is never suspended, never interrupted, never exhausted. Then, we are authorized to say, it has attended us through life, thus far, and will attend us to the end. The forever, of the text, includes in it, of course, that portion of time which has been occupied with the existence of each one of us. It involves the idea,

that the mercy of God has been concerned in ordering our lot, thus far, in the progress of life. The mercy of God did not cease when you and I were born. It smiled upon us when we first opened our eyes to the light, and it has continued to smile upon us from that hour to this. Our existence is evidence of this fact. Let any one of you, from the youngest to the oldest, take into view his age, and then consider the countless conditions of every kind, that have had to be provided for, and satisfied in all his previous lifetime, in order that such a result as this, that he should be found seated in such circumstances as you are in, in this house of God this morning, should be brought about, and then say, if anything but the care, the supervision and the power of a Divine Benefactor could have brought about such a result? Who can say that you will be here, as comfortable and as happy as you are to-day, a year hence? No one dare answer. And why? Ah, we know that that event depends upon a thousand contingencies, which we can neither foresee nor control. If this event does happen, it will be because someone, wiser and more efficient than we, has directed our steps. It will be because the mercy of God has continued to spread over us its guardian wing, and lend to us its helping hand. And what will be needed to bring us to any point which we may set before us in the future, has been needed to bring us to any point that we have reached in the past, or present. You are here to-day, because, the mercy of God, which angel-like led you to your mother's knee, to bend in childhood's prayer, has followed you through all the intervening space, and brought you, this morning, a man or a woman it may be of forty or fifty or three score years, to bend as a worshipper in Jehovah's sanctuary. In the chain of Providential blessings, which has run parallel with the chain of your life, and which is proved to be in existence still by the shining

links, which this very day's privileges exhibit, I would find one token of the enduringness of the mercy of God.

But this may be regarded as a too limited view of the matter, as an argument drawn from facts, which might be exceptional in the case of the favored few, and not universal. Consider, then, these features in Providence which do certainly belong to the general spirit and administration of it. First, that the nature of man is such, and the relation of external things to this nature is such, that enjoyment is capable of being found under almost all conceivable circumstances. You may change the position of an individual, to an indefinite degree, and it may be found upon a fair examination that you have not altered the amount of his happiness one iota. Rich men have been plunged into a state of poverty, and have found, to their surprise, after the confusion of the first shock was over, that there was as much peace and serenity in their hearts, as they have ever known in the days of their abundance. I have seen an invalid, or a cripple, manifest a degree of cheerfulness, in the chamber to which he was hopelessly confined, to which few healthy persons on the street could lay claim. The explanation of such facts is that happiness is not so much the result of outward circumstances as we suppose. The mechanism which produces it, the alchemy which makes the gold of life, lies within the man himself, not in the world outside of him. One man will draw pleasure, from a pursuit or an object, which would be a perfect eye-sore and torture to another. Nay, the same man will learn to enjoy, that which at a former period of his life he would have loathed. The reason is, that the taste and capacity for enjoyment is different in different individuals, or different at different times, in the same individual. Now, this is an arrangement of God, the architect of the soul, and of the scene in which the soul is at present called to act, and the

effect of it, is obviously, if men will not wilfully prevent it, to make happiness independent of external circumstances, to keep the current of Divine Mercy running along the track of a man's life, without material change or diminution, no matter whether that track leads through the dark places or the bright ones, the high grounds or the low ones, of earth. The thirsty spirit, if it will only look within and not without for the fountain, may fill its cup and quaff the water of joy, in every possible position. I know that it takes the rod of Christian faith sometimes, to bring the supply, as it did in the case of the Israelites, for the desert contains no springs, and the rock will not open its treasures, of its own accord; but if men will not use the rod of Christian faith, which can bring the water from the rock, this is their folly and their fault. It does not alter the fact that the water is there, and that God has made it accessible to all right-minded seekers. His mercy endures, though men in their infatuation refuse to apply to it, and choose to suffer where they might rejoice.

Then, another feature to be noticed in Providence is that forms of pleasure are to be found in the world, adapted to the wants of man's nature, in all the successive phases of its development. No stage of life can be found, that does not have its appropriate allotment of joys. Childhood, youth, manhood and old age have reached their peculiar sources of happiness. The opening flower and the swelling bud, the hum of the bee and the song of the bird, which make the springtime so beautiful, disappear, as the summer's heat comes on. But nature replaces them with other gifts. And so when these are exhausted, the autumn has its harvests to be garnered; and, when these are all reaped, and the winter's frost has chilled the air and blighted the earth, there is still the warmth of the fireside, and the glow of family intercourse, to make the sunshine of the in-

door world counteract the gloom of the outdoor one. And so in life, God's mercy has provided for the old man as well as the child, and, the purest, serenest pictures of happiness I have ever seen on earth, I think, have been found amongst the aged. Outlasting their generation, it may be, and almost everything else familiar in the world, there they stand, like the last solitary column of some spacious temple, which time and violence have crumbled to dust; and, it might be thought, that their sense of loneliness, as the crowd of strangers that know them not, rushes by them, would be absolutely overwhelming; but, no, they are not alone; one thing endures which belonged to other days, one thing, which has gone with them through their long pilgrimage, one thing which has survived the death of kindred, the changes of fortune and the revolutions of society, one friend stands by them yet, and that is the mercy of God. Inexhaustible in its resources, that can keep the coal glowing in the embers of life, that can make the fountain bubble up on the strand of time, that can make the tree bring forth fruit in old age, that can make the solitude of night bright with stars and vocal with melodies of heaven. Adapting its provisions, thus, to the wants of man, under all stages of his experience, the mercy of the Lord may be said to endure forever. These features in the providence of God, I conceive, warrant the Psalmist fully, in announcing the doctrine of the text.

And now, as a second view of the subject, I remark, that this enduringness of the Divine Mercy appears in the perpetual recurrence of the tokens of it, after temporary and occasional seasons of suspension or obscurity. It sometimes does, to our eyes, seem to disappear. There are periods in life so dark, that the poor oppressed spirit loses the power, and even the disposition, to look for light; and the grave, probably, presents itself as the only place of es-

cape from the crushing incubus of sorrow. Many of you have passed through such periods. When you were in them, you saw no end to them. But there was an end to them. The morning broke again, upon the horror of the night. Like the stream that has wandered into the cavern's mouth and fallen into a subterranean channel, and so flows on unseen for miles until some change in the level of the soil, and some opening in the rocks, lets it out to daylight again, the mercy of God, that for a small moment forsook, or seemed to forsake you, has leaped up again from the ground, beside your path, and made the scene all verdant and cheerful again. You thought it had vanished like everything else, in which you had confided; but you were mistaken. It endureth forever. One of the peculiarities of that grandest of all mountain-peaks, Mt. Blanc, "the monarch of the Alps," is that from its altitude, and from the whiteness of its eternal drapery of snow, it may be seen, on a clear day, from almost any point of the compass within a radius of fifty miles, and when seen it always appears near. When the visitor leaves it, it seems as if it pursues him. It will not consent to be left behind. You may ride for a day, putting league upon league between you and it, and yet, look back when you will, there, probably, it will stand, with its vestal bosom upon the sky, looking as if it were bending over you. You pass around some rocky ridge, and you miss it, and say to yourself, "now, at last, it has gone;" but, anon, you make another turn, and gazing out upon the scene, there it stands again, in all its glory, with its fleecy slopes all defined, and its snow-crowned summit piercing the clouds. And that is like the mercy of God. It will not leave you. It disappears only to reappear. You say farewell to it, and droop your head in sorrow, but you lift your eyes, and there it is again as bright and beneficent as ever. You lose it as the

tall cliff shoots up along your roadside, or the close ravine hides you in its gorge; but be patient, till your winding path mounts over the cliff or through the ravine, and you shall see it again hovering over you with its earthly beauty, and breathing its benedictions upon your onward way. So it came back to Jacob, so it came back to Job, so it came back to Elijah, so it has come back to God's children, great and small, in every age, all the world over, for it endureth forever.

But, beyond this fact, that the mercy of God exhibits this law of recurrence, it deserves to be noticed that even in those passages of life, where the continuity of it seems to be broken, the interruption is apparent, rather than real. If God afflicts, he himself tells us that he does not do so willingly. The motive that constrains him to do so, is that he may do good, and the importance of the end more than compensates for the painfulness of the means. The suffering which has overtaken you, may be the instrument, and the only effectual one, of keeping you from a worse and an incurable form of suffering, towards which you are hastening. Or, the chastisement that has arrested and humbled you, may teach you the depravity of your heart, and the waywardness of your conduct, and bring you out of your bondage to sin and convert you into a loyal servant of God. Or, your troubles and sorrows may be the means of helping others to virtue and happiness. Piety, upholding the saint under calamities, and showing its divine origin by the superhuman grace it imparts to him, may strengthen the faith of other weak-hearted believers, or may force the the distrust of unbelievers to give way before its convincing demonstrations. Or, vice, suffering its retributive pains, if it do not have the effect to reform the subject of them, is nevertheless a spectacle which may insure the salvation of others. The wreck on the rocks may warn other vessels of

the dangerous place. The transgressor, in his degradation and misery, may cause the minds of others, liable to the same sins, to learn with timely wisdom, that the way of the transgressor is hard. In short, admitting the impossibility of showing how the silver thread of mercy runs through every particular case of human sorrow, we may safely affirm the general proposition, that the effect of sorrow in the world is largely to subserve the best interests of the world; and that constituted as man is, were it not for the offices of sorrow, his lot on earth would exhibit far fewer traces of the Divine Mercy than it now does, so that in the very face of those things which seem to contradict it, we may still proclaim the doctrine, "his mercy endureth forever."

A third point, intimated in the text, is that the mercy of God is maintained in exercise, notwithstanding numerous obstructions to its exercise, which are erected by man himself. In no sense does the enduringness of it come out to view more strikingly, probably, than in this, that in spite of all man's abuses of God's mercy, in spite of his pride and willfulness, his recklessness and presumption, his impenitence and unbelief, God is merciful to him still. The current must be very deep, and the tide very strong, where the stream can continue to flow on, over such accumulated and powerful barriers. And yet it does flow on, year after year, over the sins of youth, and middle age, and even, sometimes, over those of extreme old age; for sometimes the mercy of God is seen bearing even the hoary headed sinner into the arms of Jesus, and landing him as a trophy of grace in the kingdom of heaven. The Apostle Paul makes use of this view of the mercy of God to expostulate with the Romans. "Despisest thou," he says, "the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" and

the Apostle Peter sets it before his readers in the same light. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promises," he says, "as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Here is an inspired commentary upon the text—God waiting to be gracious to careless, trifling, contemptuous sinners; God exhibiting forbearance and long-suffering towards hardened, arrogant, wicked men. O, surely if all other proof were wanting, this ought to be enough, to put it above all doubt or dispute, that "the mercy of God endureth forever."

But the scope of the text may lead us to still higher ground. We may take the word forever as embracing the lifetime of nations, and the world itself. With the history of the ages that have passed over our earth, and the prophetic programme of those which are yet to pass over it, we may say, giving this large latitude to the extent of it, his mercy endureth forever. Disasters innumerable we grant have attended the world's progress. Battlefields have drenched it with human blood. The car of time has gone crushing along its way, demolishing cities, governments and nations in its march, but the effect of this fact, ought to be to convince us, that there are deadly elements enough in the world, to have destroyed it a thousand times over, had there not been such an agent as the mercy of God at work in it, restraining and guiding these elements and overruling their operations for the conservation of the species, and the accomplishment of the ends for which the world was made. The mercy of God, the Bible tells us, had a very special work to do in this world of ours. It was to restore a revolted race to loyalty to their Lord. The scheme of redemption is the map of human history. The tissue of events which furnishes the matter of human history is attached in every part of it to this scheme, and

is but the development of the design conceived in that scheme. This is the testimony of Revelation on the subject. This is the clue which it gives us to the labyrinth of human history. All things from the beginning have been under Divine direction, and have been moving on towards the consummation contemplated in the scheme of redeeming mercy. The great tide in the affairs of men to whose sway all minor forces have been obedient is that power of gravitation by which the world is to be drawn to the kingdom of Christ. Mercy set that power to work, and has kept it working through all the confusion of the ages; and is keeping it working still. In God's own way, very differently, certainly, from man's way (which is just what reason would lead us to expect), the world has been rolling on towards the point set before it, in the scheme of redemption. Political events have been the slow but mighty machinery employed in clearing a highway for our God. Kings, who knew it not, were the agents of Immanuel, in planting the foundation of his throne. Philosophers, legislators and warriors have been blindly breaking up the ground that was to receive the seed, and bear the harvests of Christianity. True civilization, the offspring of true religion, has been extending its domain over the earth, embodying in its benign institutions the spirit of Divine Mercy. And its domain is destined to spread as the outgrowth of Christ's spiritual kingdom, until, like that kingdom, it achieves its perfect triumph in the spectacle of a world redeemed to God. The purpose of God to redeem the world to himself is the staple of all human history. It has never been forgotten or abandoned; and it never will be, for his mercy endureth forever.

And now, one thought more, is all that we shall have time to glance at. The forever of the text, including all time, stretches itself beyond the bounds of time. When

we are done with time it teaches us we are not done with the mercy of God. No mighty angel, like that one St. John saw in the Apocalypse announcing the end of time, shall ever come to make the doleful proclamation, "the mercy of the Lord shall be no longer." These years which have so mercifully spared us, have been the messengers of doom to others. All over the world they dot the earth with new-made graves, as they pass. They are even whispering to us as they glide by, "the fashion of this world passeth away." They show us the rich man leaving his wealth, the king resigning his crown, the wife parting from her husband, the child severed from its parents. They remind us, that all that we now love we hold by a transient tie, and that soon, stripped of all, we must lie down in the grave naked as we were born into the world. But blessed be God, there is one thing of which death cannot rob us, one thing which we can carry with us when we launch from the shores of time, and that is, the mercy of God. That will go with us over the dark abyss, and that will find for us a home in the fair city, the bright land far away, where we shall behold the King in his beauty. The mercy that has never forsaken the poor wanderer on earth, will not forsake him when he leaves this realm of vanity and sin, but has prepared for him a heaven of endless joy. And there its blessed work is to be completed and crowned. "Vessels of mercy" is the term which the Apostle uses to describe the redeemed children of God, while on earth, "vessels of mercy, prepared unto glory;" and God will set them at last amidst his glory, as ornaments in his royal palace, for his mercy endureth forever. Its ministry is to last as long as God himself lasts, and eternity will be employed in unfolding the results of the work of mercy begun on earth, in the regeneration and sanctification of the believing soul. For mercy, be it ever remembered, has no

place prepared in heaven for any soul that has not been born into the kingdom of God, here on earth. Mercy would cease to be mercy, were she to cease to make a distinction between the friends and the enemies of God. Mercy would forget herself did she not bar the gates of glory against those who have used life in rejecting Christ, and refusing to have him reign over them. Mercy can only say of them, "let them go to their own place." The filthy must be filthy still, and mercy with a flaming sword guards the portals of the holy city from the pollution of their presence; for is it not written by mercy's own hand, "there shall in no wise enter there anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." And so even in the doom of the lost, no less than in the eternal blessedness of the righteous, it will be true that mercy endureth forever.

And now, my friends, I propose this text to you, as a sort of motto, for you to take with you into the unknown sequel of your lives. It presents to you a guide and comforter, which I know you will need. The mercy of the Lord, unwasted by the lapse of time, undiminished by the drafts which have been made upon it in the past, offers to you in all their efficacy its offices and its blessings. Ah, what a poor boon would life be without them! And yet how terrible an alternative would death be without them. To enjoy those offices and blessings in their true sense you must seek the mercy of God, as it is offered to you through Jesus Christ. It is the mercy of the covenant that you need, the mercy which flows from Calvary's cross, that annuls guilt, and renews the heart, and reconciles to God, and gives a title to heaven. That mercy, may you all find! May it be your support in life, your comfort in death, and your salvation in eternity.

THE PATRIARCH'S RETROSPECT.

NOVEMBER 4, 1849.

“The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.”—GENESIS 48:15,16.

THERE is something about the sayings of men, when death is near, which always commends them with solemn force to the minds of the hearers; and in the case before us, this source of interest is heightened by the fact that the speaker is one of those Scripture worthies, whom we call the Patriarchs. Away back in the olden time—a time so old that the farthest antiquity of profane history is young in comparison—these grey fathers of the world come forth before us, to act, to speak, to die. All the witchery of ~~old~~ old, that poets feel, floats around their names; and yet nothing can be more simply true to nature, and more replete with sober, practical piety, than the images of them which we contemplate in the Bible. God seems to have been always near to them. They literally walked with him. The complicated apparatus of second causes, of natural laws and agents which, in our view, now, so generally stands between the Creator and Governor of the universe and the creatures whom he has made, is absent in this case, and every event with them comes directly from the hand of God, and every step they take is in obedience to a mandate from his lips. These things invest their biographies with a peculiar interest.

But there is another and a different reason that I would assign why the words of Jacob, and the testimony given by him in the text, are entitled to our attention. It is that he was in all respects, though a Patriarch, an ordinary man. In nothing does he seem to have been remarkable. He was gifted apparently with no talents that elevated him above the common level of humanity. He had just the usual measure, and just the usual mixture of good and bad qualities in his character; and his life was the fair type of the life of men generally. In his youth (from his own misconduct too), he was obliged to leave his father's house and emigrate to a distant region. He was poor, for as he says in one place, his staff was his only possession, when he passed over the Jordan on his way to Padan-aram. There, after many years of hard labor, in the capacity of a shepherd, after many disappointments and many contests with subtle and mercenary relatives, he amassed a fortune. There he married and reared a family. In his domestic experience he had probably about the usual allotment of joy and sorrow. With many blessings, he had many trials—such trials as are the natural fruit of the corrupt passions which dwell originally in the heart of every child of Adam. He wept over the disgrace of a daughter, and over the violence and cruelty of his sons. Like other men he tasted the bitter cup of bereavement. His favorite child was, as he supposed, torn to pieces by wild beasts, and in the depth of his grief, he felt that he should go mourning to his grave. Rachel, the idol of his early love, died suddenly while he was on a journey; and with a heavy heart he left her sleeping in a land of strangers. And in his last days, too, as not unfrequently happens, he had troubles. For seven successive years the land refused to yield its increase, till famine stalked abroad in all its horrors, and the Patriarch and his children were in danger of perishing for want of

bread. And even when relief presented itself to him in Egypt, the strange conduct of the ruler there towards his sons, filled him with alarm and gave him good cause to fear that every expedition they made to buy corn would end in their captivity or death. And then after the discovery of Joseph, he was obliged, at the age of a hundred and twenty years, to become a wanderer again and move from the country of his birth and the graves of his kindred, to a distant and idolatrous land. There, at last, a tranquil evening closed his life's changeful day; and with his children and his children's children around him, he yielded up the ghost and was gathered unto his people.

The troubles which Jacob experienced make him a sufferer; but not a sufferer in any extraordinary degree. They were such troubles as almost all persons are called upon more or less to undergo, in this world of vicissitude. Poverty, labor, injustice from evil-minded men, disappointment and suffering from the misconduct of children, bereavement, privation, failure of plans and unexpected and trying changes—these are things that enter into the lot of mankind everywhere. And this it is—this similarity in the experience of Jacob to that which men ordinarily meet with, that makes the testimony of the dying Patriarch worthy of particular attention from us all. What he was, we are, or may expect to be. He stands at the terminaton of the great highway along which we are all traveling; and is it not cheering to us to have his voice borne back to us in such tones as it breathes in the text? The God who had presided over his history and had ordered all his steps (and who is doing the same for us), he calls a "God who had fed him all his life long, and the Angel who had redeemed him from all evil." Such testimony, such an expression of his views of God's conduct towards him is cheering to us, because it encourages us to hope, that

changeeful as may be the phases of our experience in passing through life, the closing view—the revelations of the sunset hour—will enable us, too, to see the all-embracing goodness of the Providence that has presided over our career.

There had been times in the course of Jacob's life when his testimony seems to have been of a different character; when under the pressure of some present distress, his heart was filled with despondency and his lips with complaints. When Joseph's coat, stained with blood, was shown to him, so keen and overwhelming was his grief, that he refused to be comforted. He refused even to allow that there could be any comfort or joy remaining to him this side of the grave. And when after the first visit of his sons to Egypt, he learned that Simeon had been detained as a prisoner and that Benjamin must go down with his brethren when they next returned, he exclaimed, "Ye have bereaved of my children. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." When he looked back from his death bed, however, he saw that all these things had not been against him. He could include in his view all those trying emergencies that seemed at the moment of their occurrence, not only to blast his joys, but even to deny him the solace of hope, and say of all the course of God's dispensation with him, "He is the God who hath fed me all my life long, the Angel who hath redeemed me from all evil."

And this suggests the first lesson I would draw from this text, which is, that the proper standpoint at which men should place themselves when they survey and judge of the conduct of God's Providence towards them, is the terminating point of their career—that point which a Christian occupies, who calmly, intelligently, and hopefully, lies down to die. I say, "a Christian," for no one but a Christian is able to understand or estimate fairly the bear-

ing of the policy which God in his providence has pursued towards him. To one who is not a Christian, there are many departments of this policy which must always be unintelligible. As the Apostle says of the things of the Spirit of God, so it may be said to a great degree, of the things of the Providence of God. The natural man "receiveth them not," for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are "spiritually discerned." But the dying hour which religion illumines and tranquilizes, when that hour is permitted to be one in which the mind can act rationally, furnishes the point of view, from which men may with propriety and safety, examine and pronounce upon the ways of God concerning them in this life. When the shadows are gathering over the world and the clock is telling the last minute of departing day, men may sit down to write the history of the day. Then they may affirm something definite of its character; then they may make a fair estimate of its incidents and results. When the storm spirit was abroad and the sun was hid behind the rolling cloud, and the winds were rioting through the earth, and the heavens were pouring out their beating rain-floods, it would have been premature to draw the picture of the day. The evening-hour, perhaps, will disclose a spectacle of brightness and beauty which owed its existence entirely to the temporary fury of the mid-day storm. A deeper blue will be found in the sky, a richer green upon the field, a gladder warble in the throat of the bird, and a keener sense of joy in the heart of every living thing, than would have been seen or heard or felt, had no cloud veiled the sun, and no convulsion agitated the atmosphere. We are all too hasty, too arbitrary, brethren, in our judgments of God. We do not trust our Father far enough, nor long enough. We spring to a conclusion as to the character of his dealings with us from every thorn or flower, from

every spot of gloom or sunshine, that meets us in the way in which he is leading us; rather than suspend our opinions and patiently possess our souls, till we have reached the end of our way, and have gained a point where we may see all the results of the way, and the bearing upon these results of the thorns and the flowers, the gloom and the sunshine, that may have met us as we trod the way. Let us place ourselves as far as we can in the position of the dying servant of God, or rather, if we are Christians, let us endeavor to occupy in imagination the position in which we ourselves are to stand in a little while, when our dying hour has arrived. The testimony that we, standing there, would give of God and his providential dealings towards us, would be expressed; I doubt not correctly, in the words of the Patriarch, "The God who hath fed us, all our lives long, the Angel who hath redeemed us from all evil."

First, from that point the Christian will appreciate fully and in their continuity, these acts of providential goodness by which God had manifested his care for him during his life. "He hath fed me all my life long," said Jacob. So simple a thing as the daily supply of food, comes to his remembrance now. In the heat and hurry of healthy life, when our desires and appetites are all in exercise, when our thoughts are continually bounding from the present to the future, and our craving natures are turned away from the things possessed to something better hoped for and yet to come, we forget, we are insensible to, the crowd of blessings with which God is surrounding us. While life itself is held, so to speak, as a palpable possession in our hands, and a possession which we are striving to turn to various selfish accounts, we lose sight of the thousand arrangements which Providence is making for the comfort and support of life. But when we feel that we are done with life—when desire fails, and the future

rises no more before us, fascinating us with its visions of possible good—we can see with a calm, clear eye the munificent and unwasting bounty that has ministered from day to day and from hour to hour to our happiness. The blessings that escaped our notice while we were engaged in the fervid prosecution of our worldly schemes, will then all come out distinctly to view. The weary traveler arrived at the end of his journey, will see the things that contributed to his enjoyment by the way; and will wonder at the variety and multitude of them. How many have been his wants, and yet how constantly have they been supplied! When did his bread fail, or his spring dry up? In every place where he has been, his kind, thoughtful Benefactor has been with him, spreading his table and his couch, and crowning him with tokens of his goodness. He can trace back every year, he can go through the history of his childhood and youth and maturer life, and every where he sees the same stream of mercy flowing along and refreshing him with its grateful tide. He is amazed that God has never forgotten him; that he has never grown weary in attending upon his interests; that under so many and such various circumstances, and in such a succession of exigencies, his bounty has always come promptly and freely to his relief. Oh, my friends, how blind are we now to the manifold goodness of God! How little we reflect upon the countless conditions that must be harmonized, in order to the attainment of success in any one of the most trivial enterprises that we undertake! And yet how constantly God is producing happiness for us all! And how constantly he is permitting us to succeed in our plans! If we could bring more of the calmness and truthfulness of death unto life, we should see these things better. We should see what is implied in the continuance and continued pleasantness of life. We should see, in every ray of light,

in every breath of the wind, in every pulsation of our hearts, in every article of food that pleases our palates or nourishes our body, a demonstration of the Almighty's love; and we should feel like turning to God every hour of every day with all the dying Patriarch's sincerity, and devoutly acknowledging him as "the God who has fed us all our lives long." But men are so absorbed in the exercise of living, so engaged in applying life to ends of their own, that such revelations are generally delayed till a dying hour. Then, the children of God are almost universally found bearing testimony, with wondering gratitude, to his goodness. Like a disinterested spectator, standing apart from the scene he surveys, they can then look over all the way, in which God has led them; and they can mark all the varied and elaborate machinery of benevolence, which he has constructed along the path.

And more than this; there is a quality of sweetness which they can detect in the blessings, which they have enjoyed, from the fact that it is God who has given them. Food is pleasant in itself. It is a boon for which exhausted nature feels bound to be thankful; but food from the hand of one who loves us, and who has been the benefactor of our fathers before us, is doubly pleasant because of the source from which it comes. Jacob's grateful acknowledgment does not relate to the bare fact that his wants had been supplied through life. It relates chiefly to the fact that it was God who had supplied them; and the same God who had been the guide and the friend of his fathers Isaac and Abraham. The daily enjoyments which I experience are valuable to me from their intrinsic tendency to make me happy. And did they come to me from a mere mechanical laboratory, such as some men make Nature to be--where there was no intelligence, no design, or affection, still as they came to me they would be valuable. But how inexpressibly

sweeter they are to me, when I know that no blind machine has fabricated them, and scattered them in heartless munificence abroad; but that all have come direct from the hand of God—the same God that sustained and helped the prophets and patriarchs of old. This thought twines a family-bond around my heart, and makes me feel that I am a brother to all the beings whom God loves. Abraham's cup has passed down to me; and the merciful parent who filled it for him is filling it for me. I am not a homeless wanderer, gathering chance-fruit along the highway to keep me from starving; but one of a household group, sitting at a father's board, and enlivened by his kindly looks, while I am fed by his bounty. But this fact, that our comforts and blessings are directly connected with the hand of God as their source, is one which we are slow to realize, while they are pressing in their abundance upon us. We are so prone to be so much engaged with the gift, as to forget the Giver. From this point of view, however, where a dying hour will place us, we shall see this connection. The gift then will not be so large an object as the hand that bestows it. The fact that we have been fed will not so much occupy our thoughts, as the other fact that it was God who fed us. The pleasantness of our reminiscences will not arise from the fact that they present to our view so many enjoyments possessed in life, so much as from the fact, which they will show us, that it was the God of Abraham and Isaac, who deigned to follow us with his loving kindness and tender mercy, just as he followed them.

But the text speaks farther of deliverances—"the Angel which redeemed me from all evil," said Jacob. And nothing, I suppose, can seem to the child of God, in the review which he makes of life from its closing point, more wonderful, more worthy of his gratitude than these deliverances, which have been wrought for him. When they actually

occurred, perhaps he did not notice them. He did not see the evil, and hence did not know of his escape; or because his attention was so divided, and his thoughts were so soon called away by other things, he has not fully estimated the greatness of his deliverances. He will see them better when he comes to die. He will see then how thickly beset with perils his path through life has been; and how often an unseen hand has hedged up his path, or bridged it over, or screened it, or turned it about, to keep his feet from stumbling into ruin, or to shield him from the arrows or the snares of enemies. An Angel has been with him, hovering with tireless wings about his path, and ministering in ways and at times that he little dreamed of, to his welfare. To this cause he sees it now to be owing, that he escaped the temptations that enticed him in his youth, and the influence of an ungodly public example and opinions which met him when he entered upon the scenes of the busy world. Others by his side fell into vicious practices or into infidelity, or a seared stupidity of heart on the subject of religion, and so have died. But from all these he was redeemed. And from a throng of natural evils, too, he has been delivered—evils which were permitted to harass and afflict thousands upon his right hand and his left, but which came not nigh him.

But, as in the case of Jacob, there have been evils in his lot from which no deliverance has been afforded. Though he has escaped much that he might have suffered, he has still had his furnace and his flood to pass through. He has scars upon his heart which tell of days when that heart agonized and bled. Far back in the track of his journey, he sees the scenes of past trial, here a blasted spot where the frost fell upon some early joy; here a scathed relic, where some towering hope had been prostrated by the bolts of heaven; here a huge chasm, where bereave-

ment had buried in a moment the clustering pleasures of a domestic Eden; here a rough hilltop, over which with self-denying constancy he had to bear the cross of persecution or reproach; and here a wide, cheerless waste where poverty or sickness have scattered their flowerless sands. As he passed along, and these trials met him, his heart of flesh failed. Oh, how hard to bear, they seemed! Any form of affliction but the one set before him, he thought, would be tolerable. Any other sacrifice but the one demanded of him, he could make. Any other arrow from the Almighty's quiver, he could bare his heart to, but the one that was aimed at it. Oh, "if it be possible," he had cried, "let this cup pass from me," for to drink seemed to doom himself to hopeless woe. But, it could not be. He must go on through the trial. And now it lies yonder far behind him; and the mellow sunset ray is gilding it with its soft light. The Angel was with him in the dark hour, and has brought him through it. The Angel has redeemed him from all evil. Perhaps he can now see that not one of those dark hours could have been spared; and that without them, his journey would have failed to reach its present peaceful termination.

There is another feature in the view which the believer may take of God's dealings with him, from his death-bed, which is shadowed, at least, by the text. When Jacob speaks of the Angel as a person, interchangeable with God, he is supposed, upon very good grounds (reasoning from the analogy of other passages of the Old Testament) to refer to the second person of the Trinity, to him who is often called "the Angel of Jehovah," and "the Angel of the presence," as being the agent through whom, in various ways from the beginning, and ultimately by actual incarnation, the invisible Deity has revealed himself to man. It was Christ, to whom the Patriarch's dying thoughts are

supposed to have so gratefully turned. It was the mercy of God in Christ—mercy that had its origin in the covenant made with Christ, in order to the salvation of his people, that had sent him his blessings and meted out to him his trials. This fact, this relation of all his blessings and trials to the covenant of redemption (whether Jacob really alluded to it in the text or not) is something which is now clearly revealed to the child of God. And it throws a peculiar light upon all the course of his experience in the present life. He has been a redeemed man in all this course of experience. God has been treating him as such in all his dealings with him. Everything that he has enjoyed, and everything that he has suffered, may be explained by a reference to the Covenant of Redemption. Everything has been ordained in accordance with the terms of the Covenant. Everything has had some connection with the purpose of God to call him, and justify, and sanctify and glorify him in Christ. The joys he has known although in outward form like those which have been allotted to unbelievers, have had in them something better than the common blessings of Providence, for they are meant to form the refreshment by the way, for a soul for whom Christ had died, and whom the Father was leading to glory. His sorrows, too, have not been common calamities, nor the angry judgment of God. They, also, have had in them a savor of redeeming mercy. They are the chastisements of love; the pruning that makes the tree fair and fruitful; the polishing that fits the jewel for its place in the monarch's crown. Thus it is that the Angel has been redeeming him continually, and has been making all things bear upon the successful accomplishment of that great work of redemption, which he effected when he died for his salvation.

There are other features akin to this, which distinguish the aspect that God's Providences assume to his children's

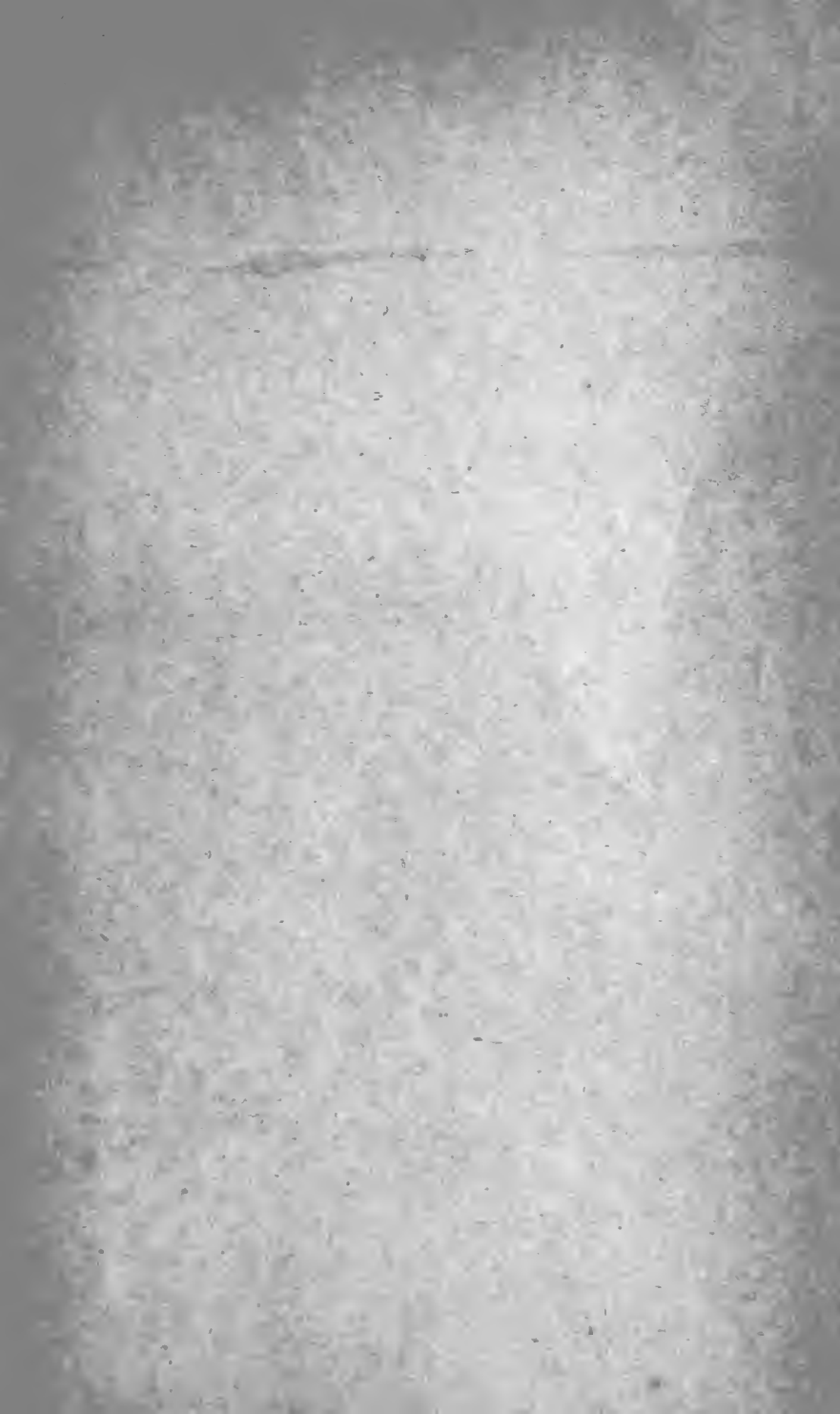
eyes when they look back upon them from a dying bed, upon which I might enlarge, but to which I can only make a passing allusion, now. Along with all these providences it will then be seen, for instance, that that Divine influence which we call grace has been communicated; fitting the individual to receive and use them for the purposes for which they were sent. It is this grace, or those dispositions, views, purposes, and efforts, which God has inspired within him which have kept him from being ruined by his blessings, and hardened by his afflictions. By this grace it is that he has been guided, supported and saved. By grace he has been aided in attaining all that he has of good, and restrained from falling into all that he might have contracted of evil. Heaven has breathed this life-giving atmosphere around him, to keep him from inhaling death from the corruption that is in the world. And grace, thus, has made him not of the world, though in the world, and though apparently, in most of the phases of his experience, like the world. Another feature in the dealings of God, which he will see at last, is that all things work together for good to them that love God, and are called according to his purpose. Jacob doubtless saw this when he uttered the text. It is hard to see it sometimes, now; but it is unquestionably true, and the dying believer will in all probability, be enabled to see that it has been true in his own case. He will see that spiritually (which is the only sense in which he will regard anything as of importance, when death is at hand), spiritually, he is better for all the arrangements and all the discipline that God has adopted concerning him, than he could have been without them. No threads in the nicely woven tissue of Providence, be it dark or light, will appear superfluous. All were needed to array him in the garment of holiness, in which he is about to see the Lord. And, lastly, all these dealings of God,

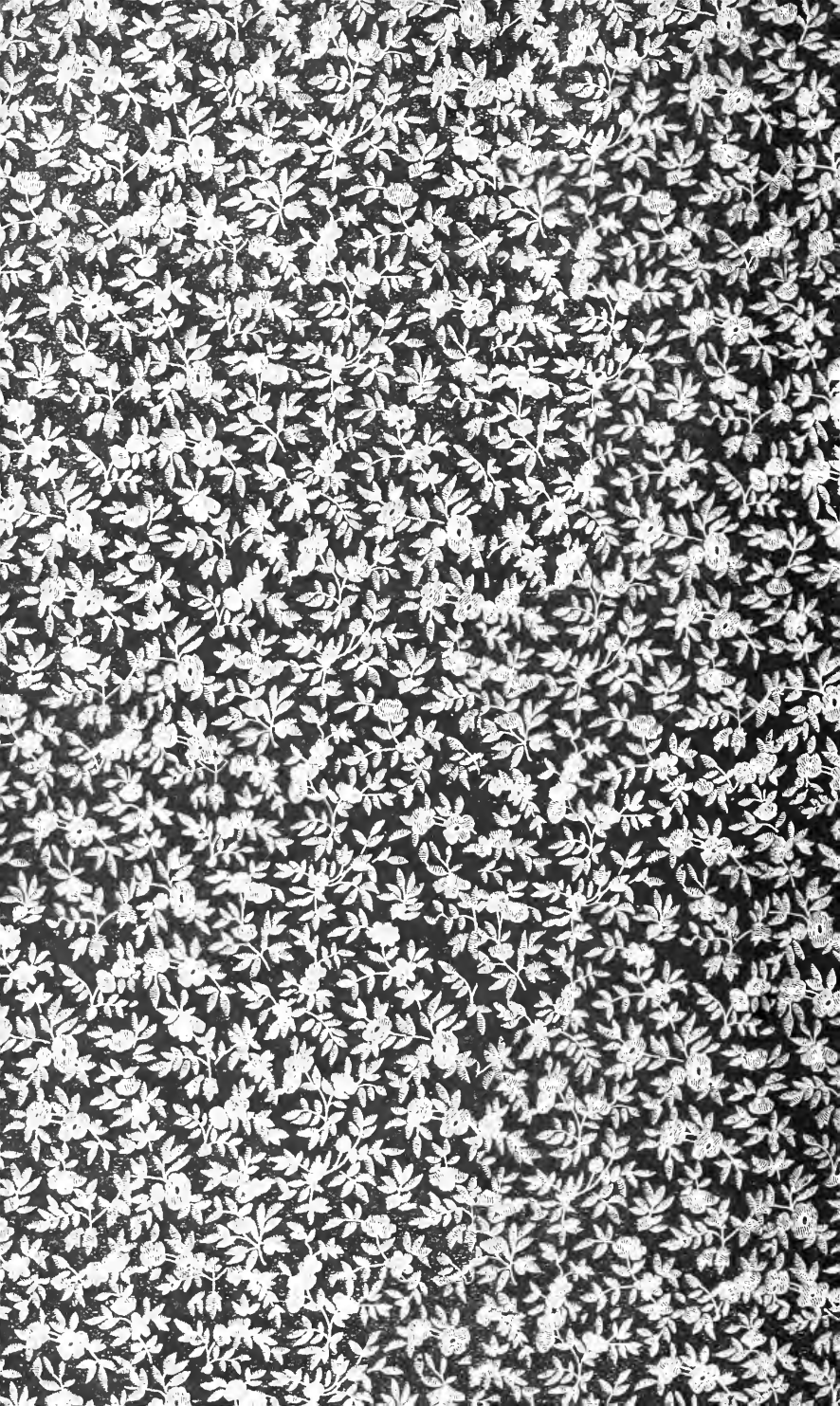
interpreted in the various ways that I have already mentioned, will (as a consequence) wear one aspect more to the believer's dying eye, and that is, that of precursors and earnest of heaven. The little rill, whether dancing in the sunbeam, or swollen with the shower, is rushing on still to the ocean; and the testimony of every murmuring wave, could we read it, is, that there is an ocean, towards which it is hastening. So the Christian's history here, whatever be the aspect of it at any particular moment, is all a prophecy of heaven. His joys and his sorrows, his struggles and his conquests, all point towards heaven. All tell him now, that God loves him, and that his purposes towards him are full of mercy; and this love and mercy are pledges to him of heaven. The oath and the promise of God, which secure eternal life to all who believe in Jesus Christ, have been written over and over again, on every page of his daily experience; and though in his dullness and heedlessness, he may have failed to see them at the moment when they were written, he will see them all in the light of his dying hour. And they will make his dying hour the dawn of heaven. They will rise before his failing eyes like the morning-star, and while he gazes at them, time will glide into eternity, the mortal will put on immortality, the star-beam will melt away, and lo, the heavens will grow strangely bright around him, for his soul will have passed into glory.

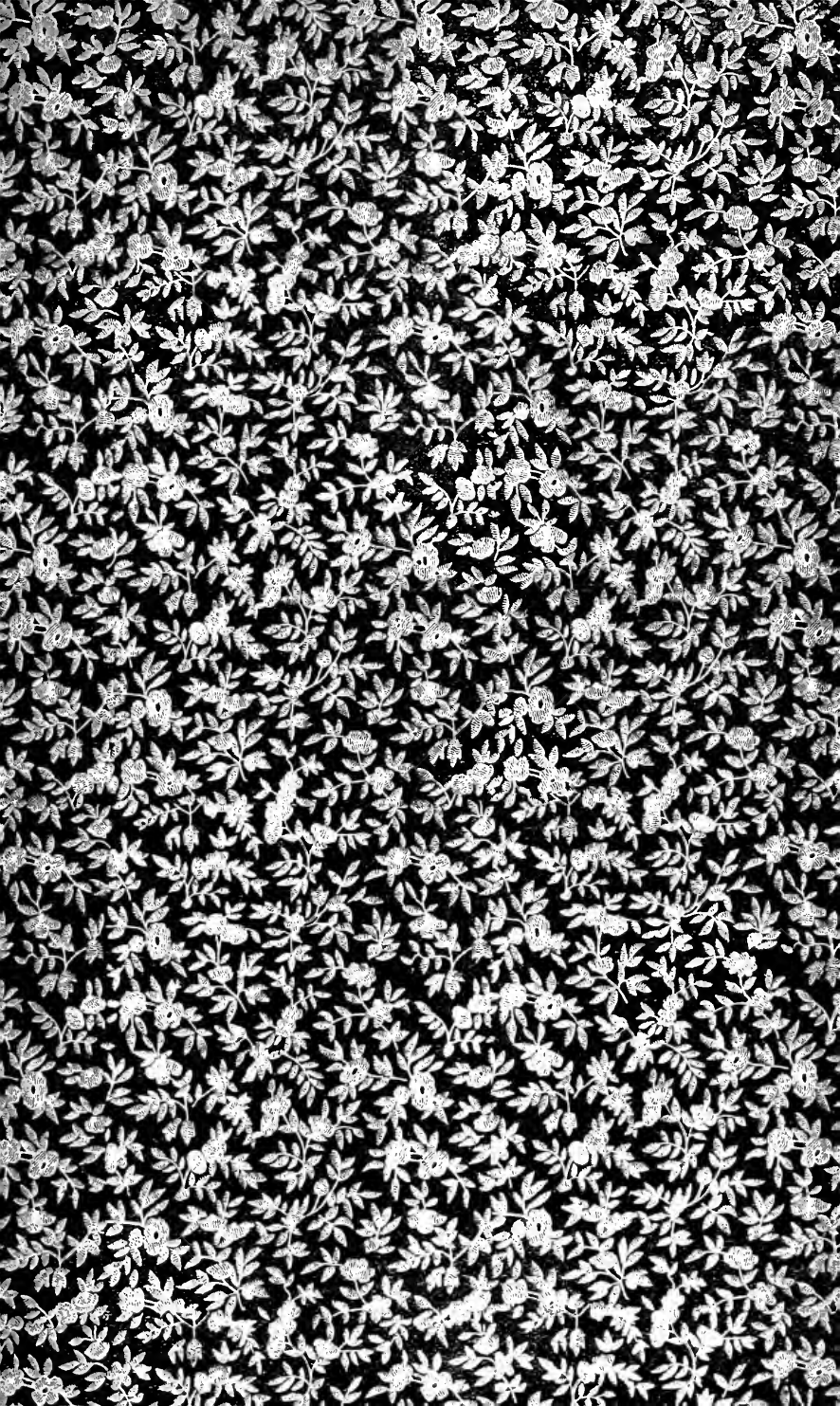














1 1012 01034 4309