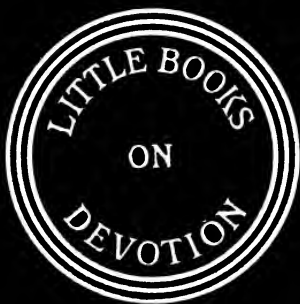


PRAISE



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PRAISE.

MEDITATIONS IN THE ONE HUNDRED AND THIRD PSALM.

BY

MARK GUY PEARSE,

Author of "THE CHRISTIANITY OF JESUS CHRIST," "THOUGHTS
ON HOLINESS," "SOME ASPECTS OF THE BLESSED
LIFE," ETC.

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“Receive, O Lord my God, my wishes and desires of giving thee infinite praise and blessing that hath no bounds, which, according to the measure of thine ineffable greatness, are most justly due unto thee. . . .

“These praises I render unto thee, and long to render them every day and every moment. And with all entreaty and affectionateness I do invite and beseech all heavenly spirits, and all thy faithful servants, to render with me thanks and praises unto thee.

“Let all people, nations, and languages praise thee, and magnify thy holy and precious name with highest joy and ardent devotion.”

THOMAS À KEMPIS.

TO
LEWIS DAVIS, Esq., J. P.
AND
MRS. DAVIS,
OF
FERNDALE, SOUTH WALES,
THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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PRAISE.

Meditations in the One Hundred and Third Psalm.

I.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

How CAN I bless God? I, dependent on his bounty, need continual blessing; but what need is there in him? I, receiving all I am and have from him, what have I with which to enrich him? And yet, if there be neither giving nor receiving, where lies the possibility of blessing?

Love is a want. We can not think of it otherwise. Infinite love is an infinite want. We can only think of love as claiming, not admiration, not service, not that which extols and magnifies its greatness, but love *must* have the appreciation and response of love. Of all things at once most delicately sensitive, and yet most persistently immortal, still may earthly love be stricken so sore that it shall die. When love has planned some good, and patiently wrought out its plan with never-failing tenderness, and brought at last its richest

and best, and yet there is no appreciation of it all, no eye that sees the love, no heart that is touched by it, no look or word of gratitude, then through and through it love is chilled as by the shadow of death. Freed as it may be from every touch and stain of selfishness, yet does love seek this as its satisfaction—the glad appreciation of its gifts.

And here, as always, love is the knowledge of God. Think of the Great Father when he had finished the earth and the heavens and all the host of them. Yet was he not satisfied. He could not rest. All was good, but that was wanting which alone could make all *very good*. What more could God desire? It was a lovely world. It is still—but what *then* when all things were fresh from the Almighty Hand; when nothing had been spoiled and nothing soiled; when no shadow of ill had fallen upon anything; no grief had saddened it; no sigh had burdened its pure atmosphere, and there had entered nothing that defiled or made it unclean? Yet was it not enough. There was none to enjoy it. Then God stooped again, and made man. And as he stood and looked forth upon it all, the wisdom, the beauty everywhere, the variety and use and perfect fitness of all things, he turned it into love and praise. Now all was *very good*. Now could God rest from his labors. And there evermore is his resting-place: *He inhabiteth the praises of Israel*.

This, then, is man's lofty place and purpose in creation. His praise is the completion of creation.

He is to see the source of things, to find their worth, to feel the love that lies in all, and to make earth's good become God's *very good* by use and gratitude. Man is the last link between creation and the Creator, and by our praise we pass all things back to him from whom all things have come.

Bless the Lord, O my soul! for when I am blessing him, then only am I right with God, then only am I right within myself, then only am I right with anything.

Then only am I right with God when everywhere I find the presence of my gracious and loving Father bending over me with an unwearied and unutterable goodness, ordering all that concerns me with tender care and perfect wisdom; when in everything I trace his love, and with a deep and wondering joy all that is within me unites in blessing Him.

Then only am I right within myself: for to be ungrateful is to be thrice blind, seeing neither my dependence, nor the Giver, nor the gift. Ingratitude is the sum of all sins. Pride gives no thanks; it takes all as its due, and counts no gift a favor. Envy is never grateful. It sees only what others have, and enjoys nothing. The fearful and unbelieving is dumb. He doubts if anything be meant for him; and if it be his, he doubts at once its blessedness and love. A dull soul is the ingrate, without eye or ear or heart or hand. Thankfulness is the mark of a gracious spirit. It betokens

a sensitive nature, one that lies open to the breath and whisper of love; a soul melodious, in whom the touch of heaven finds a glad response of love.

Then only am I right with anything when I perceive the grace and wisdom that is hidden in all, and by gratitude do transform the common earthly good into a property and possession of heaven. I am to live seeing whence things come, and speeding them thitherward again on the wings of thanksgiving—all the circumstance and condition of the daily life turned to such account that God shall have his own with this sweet usury of praise.

So blessed a thing is gratitude and so blessing that the richest man in all the world is he who is most grateful; for he is the richest, not who has the most, but who sees the most in what he has. Of all men most blessed is he who finds the most of mercy in his mercies, the most of goodness in his goods.

Bless the Lord, O my *soul!* The worth of any action is according to the measure of the soul that is in it. The real difference between men is here. Bodies differ but by inches—a foot or two is all; but soul differences are wide apart as heaven and hell. What is genius but soul? A life, a fire, a force, an authority inspiring words and deeds. The home of praise is the soul. She can live nowhere else. Theories, opinions, notions, linger in the mind; pious utterances and sweet songs may dwell

on the lips; but praise dwells only in the heart, and claims all the depths of the man. Praise is the fair daughter of Faith and Joy. When the innermost soul holds such a knowledge of God that it rests in him with an untroubled confidence, then Praise, like the linnet, sings because she must. Praise is contentment rippling over into gladness, like the music of the brook. The sense of God's goodness has deepened into a compulsion of indebtedness, and the soul can find its only outlet and acknowledgment in praise.

So David urges his soul to this exercise. He is not content to think about the duty of praise, can not satisfy himself with "desiring to be truly thankful." There is no music so long as it is a matter of theory only and explanation, however philosophical and eloquent; the sweet strains must be rung out. This music of praise wants soul-effort, and demands all the soul.

The want of the age this—of all ages—*soul!* Quaint old Matthew Henry points out that Abraham's slaves, which he had gotten in Haran, are called *souls*. In these times servants are called *hands*. A world of difference. *Hands*—four fingers and a thumb—to get as much out of as one can, and to put as little into, from the master's standpoint. And from the servants—to pick up as much as they can and to give as little back again. When master and man can find in each other's relationship a soul—a living, earnest, brotherly soul—then

only are the work and wages alike right. In least and commonest works we want, not *hands* only, but souls. If I hire a man to do my garden, and I find him scarcely playing at the work—for men put their souls into their play—but “dawdling” only, tickling the earth with a rake, as if he expected it to laugh into flowers, I would sooner fling him his half-crown, and do the work right earnestly myself. So do we value soul, we who see but the outside of men. Think, then, of him whose eyes do look us through, *the Father of spirits*, whose contact is ever with the inner man, the soul. If that sleeps, how poor in his sight, how vain and mocking, is any service that we pretend to render him! Here all is worse than nothing if there be not reality, heart, earnestness. There can be no praise except as the strength of the soul is in it. Away up in the old church tower I have heard the wild winds that swept about the hollow chambers sighing and moaning within the massive bells, the faintest of faint sounds. But who should call that anything? It is only when the sturdy ringers grip the ropes and pull in turn with might and main that the glad peal goes crashing with music, floating over land and sea, and they who are far off stand still to listen to the message of its joy. The bells of Mansoul need a like set purpose and vigor to wake the melody of praise.

An art this of praise that comes only by exercise. And alas! an exercise for which most Chris-

tians find no room, no stated place in their devotion. In public service praise has its place allotted; but in private devotion praise is too commonly forgotten. Prayer and the Scriptures no earnest Christian ever neglects; but for praise many good men appear to have no place, no sunny interval. It would almost seem as if some Christians were afraid to thank God heartily—it savors of presumption, except “in choirs and places where they sing,” there only “followeth the anthem.” A friend sat once at dinner with me, and asked a blessing on the meal: “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful!” I devoutly added my Amen. When we had finished, I asked him to give thanks: “For what we have received may the Lord make us truly thankful!” Then I withheld my Amen. “Forgive me, dear friend,” I ventured to say, “may I ask *when you do give thanks?*” “Did I not thank him *then?*” he asked, surprised. “I think not,” I added. “Is it any use having the organ always tuned if it is never played upon?”

Bless the Lord, O my soul! *Do it—do it now.* Exercise yourself in the art and mystery of praise. We are here to serve our apprenticeship to this blessed craft, that as very masters we may by and by take our place in the eternal praise on high. Give thanks. Let the soul spread wide her wings, and go soaring up to heaven, singing as she soars: “Bless the Lord, O my soul!”

Note, further, the individuality of the praise—O my soul! Blessed be God! He makes room for me. Come, my soul, he bids thee join his choir. He would hear thy voice, and that not only in the choruses, but for a solo. Think how that I can give to God a bit of music that none else can bring. Our characters differ much, and yet more do our circumstances. Now, nobody has ever yet been led along the way in all its windings by which I have come. To me has been given some token of his love that none else ever proved. So then I, even I, can bring some note of music, without which the great chorus of God's praise is incomplete. If I am dumb, there lies forever "forgotten in unthankfulness" some revelation of his goodness, some deed of his love. Bless the Lord, O *my soul!* Do not envy any man. Do not try to be anybody else. Be thou filled with his praise; and if it be like no other, so much the better. Yet do not want others to be as thou art; rather, soul, be thankful that so few are like thee. But be thyself. God, "who maketh us to differ," wants the strains of my voice, the song of my soul. Shall the bass of the organ refuse to lend its music because the treble leads? Or shall the treble be dumb because the thundering bass makes more ado? Are not all needful to the fullness of the praise? My soul, take thy part.

Have you noticed the variety there is in the great choir of our God as it is celebrated in the one hundredth and forty-eighth Psalm? *Praise ye him,*

all his angels. "Ah yes!" we sigh. "Pure and holy as they are, well may they praise him, excelling in strength and hearkening to the voice of his Word." *Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise him, all ye stars of light.* "Ah yes!" we sigh again, "if we were but like them! Beautiful and ever-blessing; telling out the greatness and the glory of our God." Then comes another strain: *Praise him from the earth.* Come, poor earth can take her place. And where shall the psalmist begin here? Not with the kings, lest the lowly should despair. Not with the sweet-voiced maidens nor with the strength of the young men. Not with the old men rich in matter for thanksgiving, nor with the children full of glad music. Not these first. *Praise the Lord . . .* YE DRAGONS! Come, my soul, there is room for thee. This is the glory of our God, that he can teach the fierce and destructive things—the fire, the hail, the stormy wind—to sing glad songs of praise. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

And look again at this one hundred and forty-eighth Psalm. Let it be a very picture of thyself. Thou art within thyself a universe to be filled with his praise. Thy very constitution and thy nature, whatever thou art, summon thee to this work of praise. Let the heights and heavens within thee praise him. The things that he has made sweet and fair—thy sun and stars—the reason and the clustering thoughts, let them praise him and proclaim the Hand that fashioned and sustains their

delicate balance. Thy memories, like old men full of treasured tokens of his love, thy hopes like sunny children, fresh and pure—let them praise him. The deeps, the fires of the soul and the fierce things within thee—let these put energy and intensity and passion into thy praise. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Come, then, my soul, rouse thee to this blessed work. Whoever else is silent, be thou filled with praise. Thy God who hath filled thee with good things listens for thy voice; if it be wanting, he is grieved and thou art condemned. It is said that once, when Sir Michael Costa was having a rehearsal with a vast array of performers and hundreds of voices, as the mighty chorus rang out with thunder of the organ and roll of drums and ringing horns and cymbals clashing, some one man who played the piccolo far away up in some corner said within himself, "In all this din, it matters not what I do," and so he ceased to play. Suddenly the great conductor stopped, flung up his hands, and all was still—and then he cried aloud, "*Where is the piccolo?*" The quick ear missed it, and all was spoiled because it failed to take its part. O my soul, do thy part with all thy might! Little thou mayest be, insignificant and hidden, and yet God seeks thy praise. He listens for it, and all the music of his great universe is made richer and sweeter because I give him thanks. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

And all that is within me, bless his holy name. "All that is within me." It is good to think that each one of us can stand up, a God-made man in a God-made world, and that from head to foot there is nothing in us but that which God himself has made for his praise. The devil made nothing—can, indeed, make nothing. He is Apollyon, the destroyer. His power is only to unmake and to mar God's fair creation. Come, then, my soul, do not be afraid to be thyself. Do not spend thy strength in trying to press thyself into the mold of some other man. God made thee, not the devil,—made thee wholly; therefore let God have thee, and that altogether. Do not be everlastingly saying and suspecting thyself. Praise requires freedom, confidence, and gladness. Constraint is but a clumsy musician. Fear can not sing. Sorrow sits in silence looking earthward, her harp upon the willows, sighing ever, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" It is when we are at home in the blessedness of the Father's house and in the joy of his presence that we begin to be merry. Every string in the harp is needful—only let the Hand that made it have it again that he may set it in perfect order, and then have it always for his service and his praise. We *need* not enter into the kingdom of heaven maimed, or having one eye only. There is nothing in my body or soul or spirit that God

can not sanctify wholly, and being sanctified shall be *preserved entire*, as it runs in the New Version, *without blame*. Temperament, constitution, all is his; hold it as from him, use it as for him. Life owes much of its freshness and fullness to the mercy that "maketh us to differ." If thou art merry, let him have thy joy; if of more melancholy mood, thy praise may gain in depth and sweetness, though it lose in strength. If he have filled thy mouth with laughter, let thy humor be for him—for that, too, is of God, and not of the devil; a power that doeth good like a medicine. If thou art weak, then let patience have her opportunity; she who singeth with the nightingale's note, cheering the gloom. If thy gifts are of imagination, of reason, of judgment, let them praise the name of the Lord. If thy soul is in thy business, let God have thee there, that the world about thee may hear the strong, clear notes of integrity and uprightness and considerateness for others. Let all that is within thee bless his holy name, then shall all that is about thee be held for his service; as when in the din of some market-place, amid the hurry and hubbub of the people, from within the great cathedral there comes upon it all the pealing of the organ and the singing of the choir, neither hindering nor interrupting the traffic, but, like a breath of heaven, purifying and uplifting all.

All that is within me. It is good to exercise

the different parts of the soul in this work of praise; good to say sometimes, "Memory, fetch me a song for my Lord." Memory hath a sweet voice. Like the linnet, she singeth sitting on the bough. O, it is good to hear Memory singing! Listen, as she sings in soft and tender tones about the love that waited for our coming long ago; about those faces that watched our waking up to life and made its beginning full of beauty and blessedness; about the arms that screened those early days with gentle care. She sings on with louder notes about the way in which the Lord has led us, songs of his patience, never-failing; of his goodness, inexhaustible; of mercy infinite; songs of friends who have enriched our lives; of deliverances; of sorrows healed. Ah! Memory, sing on, in heaven itself no music shall be sweeter than thine!

And it is well sometimes to say, "Hope, fetch me a song for my Lord." Hope sings not like the linnet from the bough, but, like the lark, she soars as she sings, and sings then most sweetly when nearest heaven's gate. Ah, listen! she is lost in the light, and from those still heights we catch the rapturous throb of her song. Canst thou hear her, as if she had found the pure passion of heaven's bliss and passed it down to us? Listen—"I see one who standeth in the presence of the King, white-robed and glorious, excelling in strength, serving day and night in the holy temple.

His face shineth like unto the King himself, a mind like heaven's crystal walls wherein there entereth nothing that defileth or maketh unclean, a heart for evermore the home of purest love, a life unceasing and unwearied in its glad devotion to the glory of the Lord." My soul, that hope is *thine*. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name!

II.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all
his benefits.”

QUAINT and forceful are the words of Gurnall:

“ The well is seldom so full that water will at first pumping flow forth; neither is the heart commonly so spiritual after our best care in our worldly converse—much less when we somewhat overdo therein—as to pour itself into God’s bosom freely, without something to raise and elevate it; yea, often the springs of grace lie so low that pumping only will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul before the affections rise. Hence are those soliloquies and discourses which we find holy men use with their own hearts to bring them into a gracious temper, suitable for communion with God. It seems by these verses David either found or feared his heart would not be in so good a frame as he desires, consequently he redoubles his charge; he found his heart somewhat drowsy, which made him thus rouse himself.”

That is true of all religious exercises, yet is it most true of this exercise of Praise. Prayer seeks rather a coming down of God to me than

my going up to Him. Prayer lifts its eyes unto the hills, and waits, watching for the coming of the Almighty with his help and blessing. But Praise flies away to the hills, away to the clefts of the rock on the mountain-top. In Praise grace finds its own level, and mounts up again to those heavenly fountains and springs whence it hath come. So does Praise require all the energy of the soul; such energy as to be unconscious of effort, a sweet outflowing and upflowing of the soul to God; even as the great sun lifts the sea itself into the clouds.

Of these arguments, by which the psalmist seeks to stir his soul, the first is this: *Forget not all his benefits.*

Do as thou wilt, soul; be thou never so earnest and watchful, yet canst thou never *know* all his benefits, nor canst thou even remember all that thou hast known. This is as high as thou canst get—do not forget them all. That this is all we *can* do, turns it into a pathetic appeal. Thou canst give but this little: do thy diligence gladly to give that little, seeing it is in return for so much. *Forget not all his benefits.* Alas! that it should be so easily possible to us. Thinking of ingratitude as the blackest of sin, resenting it angrily if perchance our poor favors should come to be loosely held or lightly forgotten, yet how carelessly do we take our place amongst those who have forgotten all his benefits!

Think of our gracious Lord having made and fitted all things for man's good—all things within the man, the body, the soul, the reason, the senses; having adapted him perfectly to his surroundings—giving him health, and food, and friendship; giving him grace and opportunity in everything for infinite development—and yet what thousands of us are daily using his light, his strength, his bountiful provision, without any sense of indebtedness, without any tribute of praise! Now, my soul, canst thou come to be one of these? Rouse thee to this work of praise, and keep thyself up to it. Forget not all his benefits.

Look again at this host of thankless ones, and see some of the characters more carefully. Here is *the grumbler*. Look well at him—a man who in every moment of his life has received from God more mercies than he could ever count. Moment after moment the stream has been unchecked for days, for months, for years; yet there he stands just as poor as if God had never done anything for him, his memory clean swept of every mercy. If the sun had never shone, if Infinite Wisdom had never ordered the world, and Infinite Love had never given a sign of its being, the man could not have more completely forgotten all his benefits. O great is the power of grumbling! Blindness blots out the shape and color of things; yet sweet sounds do find a way into the soul, and a thousand influ-

ences touch and bless us like the gentle hand of God. But the ingrate hath no sense. Not blind only is he, but dead, stone dead.

And in this evil crowd here, too, are Fearing and Little Faith, muttering to themselves about a host of dreadful things—if this happen and that, and if such and such ill come upon them! They, too, have forgotten all his benefits. Just as poor and friendless are they as if the gracious Father had never given them ten thousand tokens of his loving care; as if he had never set ten thousand promises to brighten all the coming days. My soul, then only art thou safe when thou art blessing him. Forget not all his benefits.

Now, that we may not forget his benefits, it were well to take much note of them. As a careful merchant is not content only to receive his merchandise, but he directs that the goods be *weighed*, they must be *counted*, they must be *measured*, so let us deal with God's gifts.

First, *Let us weigh them*. They are substantial. Many things that look much are but little in the scales; but God's gifts weigh well. *Benefit*—the word itself is a solid word—*bene-volence* hath a sweet sound, but without *bene-fit* it is as light as air. Yet is benevolence a thing for which we give thanks. As when on some dark night of blustering storm we have to cross the moor by some uncertain track, and the loneliness is broken by

a cheery greeting of "Good-night!" Good will is good; but good deed is better. And the cheery voice cries: "Stop a moment! It is an awkward path to find, and there are pits, and you may flounder into a bog. I will light my lantern and show you the way." That is *benevolence* turned to *bene-fit*. And God's benevolence ever becomes God's benefit. He loveth not in word only, but *in deed* and in truth. *God so loved that he gave*—is ever the manner of his love.

Yet alas! though *our* benevolence seeks to bless, how often the benefit is but a poor result that mocks the good we meant to do! Our charity hath a right heart but a clumsy hand, spilling sometimes even more than she bestows. Our gifts are often ill-chosen or ill-timed; and that which springs from purest purposes of love may yet work harm. But ah! the benefits of our God! It is good to think of how they came, and when. New beauty is unfolded as we look at them in every new light. When God sends forth the angel of his goodness, he bids his power go at her right hand, and his wisdom at her left; and ever these three come forth as his almoners. "*Surely blessing I will bless thee*" is the message that they bring with their great Master's love. My soul, weigh his benefits. They are substantial.

Secondly. *Count his mercies.*

I was going home one winter's evening with my little maiden at my side, when she looked up into

the sky, and said, "Father, I am going to count the stars."

"Very well," I said, "do." And soon I heard her whispering to herself, "Two hundred and twenty-one, two hundred and twenty-two, two hundred and twenty-three;" and then she stopped and sighed, "O dear! I had no idea they were so many!" Like that little maiden, I have often tried to count my mercies; but right soon have I had to cry, "I had no idea they were so many!"

How rich does the poorest of us become if he will ask himself, "How much have I got that God could take away?" Let us begin with the lives that are dearer to us than our own. The love of father and mother, or the memory of their holy example that made goodness beautiful. Let us count up the joys of family life—the love of wife and little ones, the trust and patience and tenderness that God has wrought in us through these, the sweetness and the rest of home. Give thanks, my soul, for love, commonplace as the sunshine, and yet as blessed and as constant. Give thanks for life and for duty, for ten thousand things that discipline and develop us for higher service. He took David from the sheepfold to make him king, had trained him by the common toil of the shepherd for the throne and scepter; and ever thus he seeks by all the coarsest, commonest round of daily life to make us kings and priests unto God; by all things ennobling, enriching, purifying us. Forget

not all his benefits, O my soul, from whom every breath bears some new blessing, and every moment brims with lovingkindness.

Give thanks for *character*. Think how much it is to thee. Think how easily suspicious circumstances might gather and hang like a cloud about us, darkening all the life. How easily tarnished and blistered is the fortune of our good name, which being damaged can never wholly be repaired, and, being lost, all life becomes a burden—a burden not shared, but doubled, by the love of those who are our own. O my soul, forget not this great goodness—that the Lord doth keep thee in his pavilion from the strife of tongues!

Think again of thy *senses*—the reason, whose delicate balance might be so lightly overthrown; the wondrous gifts of sight and hearing; the powers of heart and mind and body, which make enjoyment possible and easy; and for all that is fair and beautiful in the world about us.

It is well sometimes to sail down the river *Might-have-been*, in quiet times to loose the moorings and to drift with the tide, stopping here and there. Here is the hospital. Think of those who lie in their beds, each with some story of suffering. Every hour drags out its dreary length; every moment pain gnaws as with tooth of fire, or beats on with dull, heavy, throbbing blows. There are troubled thoughts of those at home, and burdening fears about the future, the business slipping

away, or the occupation lost whilst the bread-winner lies here. Ah my soul! how much dost thou count this worth, the golden gift of health and strength?

Stay here again, where some poor creature is driven by some fierce delusion as one possessed; or here, where sits the driveling idiot, a burden to himself and others. My soul, what thinkest thou of this priceless gift of reason which God's own gracious care preserves to thee day after day?

Or step in here, where poverty has overwhelmed the home, and bit by bit the comforts are gone; one by one the treasured little possessions are parted with; day after day the want grows sorer, and now fiercely has the man to fight against the devil of a hardened and sullen defiance, and yet more dreadful thoughts toward God and man. Not with any Pharisaic superiority, God forbid! but with a heart softened and most pitiful, with eyes opened afresh, let us give thanks for all his benefits.

Stay here, again, where a white-faced woman moves to and fro in a hovel stripped bare of everything but filth, where the children fight and snarl over their scanty food like wild beasts, and curse God (as wild beasts do not); where the staggering steps of the father bring the greatest terror of their lives, and blows and curses greet those who have a right to his tenderest love. Then come back again, and gather your own children about you, listen to the music of their voices, look into the sunny faces,

and ask yourself, Why was not *that* their home yonder? "O my soul, forget not all his benefits."

And yet once more come forth. Dost thou see one who goes along his way there, with slouching gait, blear-eyed, foul-breathed, hugging his rags about him, his face stamped and branded by his vice, dreading lest some eye that knew him in the old better time should recognize him now? Who is it? Ah! my brother, it is thou—it is I—if God took away the finger of his grace from the heart, and let the mischief that is there burst forth as it might do. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Thirdly, *measure his mercies*. Gratitude is mainly a matter of right measurement. There is a way of measuring mercies so that mountains sink to molehills; there is a way of measuring mercies so that molehills rise to mountains. To be a master of the art of mensuration is to be a very master in the art of Praise. Therefore, look well to thy foot-rule.

Do not measure the benefits by the desires.

Our desires are made for God, and can be filled with nothing less. Like unto God himself, they are infinite. A man might gain the world, a million worlds, and yet should die of very want—losing his own soul for want of that wherewith to keep it. Sin and the devil are ever seeking to make the man

little enough for a handful of earth to satisfy him. They can not, thank God! The restlessness, the longings, the weariness tell how utter and how dreary is the failure. Only in loving and serving God has any heart ever yet found deep, abiding peace and rest and blessedness. Do not measure the benefits by the desires.

Do not measure the mercies by other people's. We do not know what other people's mercies are. Their mercies and ours may be very different. The mercies of one man do often become the curses of another. Things are not benefits till they are rightly taken, rightly used, rightly acknowledged; and that depends upon the heart more than upon the gifts. The "good things" of Dives were his evil; and the "evil things" of Lazarus, if they drove him nearer to God and kept him there, were only good. The fruit which grows on the tree of knowledge of good and evil we all have eaten from our youth up, and yet which is which no man can wholly tell. The senses can not always discern between poison and food and physic; and different conditions may change each one of these into the other. Therefore is it only safe for children to abide by the choice of those who know. In this matter we are children still, and are only happy when we have learned to trust our Father, and count his choice for us as good, and only good, continually.

I learned a lesson once that has been to me a lifelong blessing. It was away in a little village in

Bedfordshire, as I was walking home one winter's night, the moon at its full and brilliant in the frosty air. My companion was an old laborer, whose way lay for a mile along the road, and whose company was always a joy to me when I preached at that little place. I can see him now—the tall, thin figure, somewhat bent with years and toil, the dark smock-frock, and the tightly-buttoned leggings reaching down to the heavy boots. His face, always lit with a smile, was reddened with the sun and winds in which he spent his days. Working away in the stillness of the fields he mostly had none to talk to but his God, and that blessed opportunity he turned to such account that he grew rich indeed in wisdom and grace. We had walked in silence for awhile; for thinking was more in his way than uttering his thoughts, when he stopped and turned to me, "I been turning over a thing, sir, that I should like to say to you."

"What's that, friend?" I asked.

"Well—I been thinking that if you and me only knew all about everybody else, there is nobody in the world that you and me would change with."

Everybody else! And instantly there crowded before me hosts of the great and famous men of the earth—kings and mighty men of renown, high lords and dainty ladies, wealth, splendor, brilliant honors, genius—were they all so little that the summit of life's blessedness could be reached by a poor laborer with perhaps twelve shillings a week! Then

I turned wondering, and caught sight of that face where heaven's peace and sunny joy seemed to have traced itself in every curve and feature. "*Nobody we would change with,*" I said to myself, as we went on our way; and before my answer was ready, we had reached the place where our ways parted.

"Well," I said, "yours is too big a thought to take in all in a minute. I will turn it over and tell you what I think about it when we meet again." Then I held the hand in mine, and felt the hard edges of the cracks that ran across the horny palm, and almost wished that I could change places with a man who had such a trust in God as that.

"I do believe that you will find it be true," said he. Then I hurried on my way alone.

True! Why, as I began to think of it, everything became full of its truth. It was a master truth to which all things did homage—all the voices of heaven and earth seemed to take it up and proclaim it in mighty chorus. Can God order the stars, calling them by their names, and assigning to each its place; can God guide the birds, teaching them of the seasons, and leading them over sea and land to find their fittest home; can God suit soil and circumstance to every common bush and wayside flower; and shall men and women be flung into the world haphazard, without love or wisdom, without order or meaning? On every side the truth

opened new avenues of beauty. Day after day it lived in me and interpreted the mysteries of life. My heart found in it a strength and a new song. And then I met my old friend again. I grasped that horny hand.

"Is it true, sir?" he asked, and his eyes lit up with joy as he read the answer in my face.

"True!" I cried, "it is gloriously true! It is wonderful! Tell me, where did you find that thought?"

"I picked it up at the plow-tail, sir," and as he spoke, the ruddy cheeks shone with gladness.

"Ah!" said I, "I wish I could make my sermons at that plow-tail of yours. 'Nobody in the world that we would change with.' Why, look here!" and I showed him the snowdrop that grew in the hedge, "there, see how that hangs its tiny bell upon the breeze. It is exactly adapted so that the winds should do for it what the insects do for the later flowers. He can fit men and women to their times and places, as well as snowdrops."

"Ah bless him, he does!" said my old friend, devoutly.

Science teaches us of the fitness of things to their "environment." O blessed science that believes, and rests in the belief, that when we do but let our Father have his own way with us, he leads us day by day where all things are best fitted to shape us after the image and likeness of God!

Not by our desires can we measure our mercies, nor by other people's. There is but one thing by which we can rightly estimate them. *Measure the mercies by the foot-rule of our deserts.* Then only can we know how many they are; then every mercy shall amaze us by its greatness.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

III.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. . . . Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.”—PSA. CIII, 1, 3.

THIS is the first great topic of praise in the Psalm of Thanksgiving: *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities*. And this must ever be first; for it is the mercy out of which all other mercies grow. Here begins the rich, deep music of which heaven itself is but an eternal development. My soul, if thou canst not sing this, thou hast never begun to sing; and if thou dost once begin it, surely thou canst never cease.

Does it not seem a perilous thing to bring into a glad song like this such dreadful subjects as God's "holy name" and "all thine iniquities," and to set them thus side by side? Poetry and art must select their subjects, and haughtily pass by on the other side of all that is not picturesque. Ah! blessed boldness which only God can inspire! The soul must have itself in perfect harmony before it can find the music that satisfies it. Fear is fatal to song, therefore must no secret be hidden—a skeleton whose icy hand laid on the strings would make the

music mute. Nor must there be dreadful possibilities like that which turned Belshazzar's feast into a tragic terror. All must be well before the soul can ring out its rapture of praise. The tension of the chords and the skillful player are not enough; the resonance and accurate response of all that lies about the strings is essential to music. And with an instrument of such compass as the soul, touching highest heights—God's "holy name"—and deepest depths—"all thine iniquities"—what power can restore and sustain its harmony, and fill all that is within it with praise? Is not this the glory of the Bible, the great stamp of its Divinity, that it treats not of ideals, but of the coarse and stubborn facts of our humanity? It is a poor system that must intoxicate men into forgetfulness, that it may teach them to sing. There comes a rude awakening. This Book does not weave garlands to hide unpleasant truths. It brings our sins right out into the light, sets our secret sins in the fierce white light of God's own holiness. And this is the glory and the wonder of the revelation it makes, that, although hell itself is the awful jarring and discord of our iniquities in conflict with God's holiness, and although heaven be nothing less than a perfect harmony with God's holiness, yet is there a way in which we even here can begin to sing the songs of heaven, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God."

“*His holy name. . . . All thine iniquities.*”—
 The two great mysteries these, into which no man can see except as God shall show him. The two great mysteries which, if any could see so as God sees them, all hope should die within him. The two great mysteries of which the Holy Ghost is come to teach us, he whose twofold emblem is the dove and the fire.

Only by beginning here can any learn to sing this song; for *the song of forgiveness is born of penitential sorrow*. It is as when of old God would have the earth at its fairest for the coming of Him who was to have dominion over it all: and “there went up a mist and watered the earth”—hung it all in tears. The leaves were heavy and dripping, the flowers were sodden, the drenched grass was matted together. Then arose the sun, and out of tears came radiant beauty; for the ruddy light shot through it all and glistened in every drop, and hung the trees with diamonds, and sowed the grass with Orient pearl, and flashed on every side with emerald and ruby, and a jewel was lapped in every flower. So is born the joy of the Lord. The Sun of righteousness arises and shines upon the tears of our penitence and grief. Or yet again: it is as when in some overheated day the black clouds of thunder creep up the sky and blot out the sun; not a breath stirs the languid leaves, nor any sound breaks the awe and hush of all things. Then comes the lightning flash. And then the crashing thunder, “like a whole

sea overhead," and the floods that run in rivulets on every side. And afterwards the new life, filling everything with cool, delicious freshness. The sun glistens in the raindrops and tips the edges of the departing clouds with gold, and flings a rainbow right across the heavens; and on every side bursts forth a ringing gladness, like the prophet's song of old: "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me."

If there be no deep sorrow for sin there can be no rapturous song of forgiveness. The fifty-first Psalm goes before the one hundred and third, and leads up to it. It is because the prodigal has felt all through him, overwhelming him, that he has sinned and is no more worthy to be called a son, that he rejoices with such a fullness of joy in the father's welcome, and begins to be merry.

Now, my soul, art thou willing to be taught of these things—God's holiness and all thine iniquities? Come, then, "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Open wide the doors and windows of the soul. Tarry in the presence of God. Surrender thyself wholly to his leading. And now, as in his light and beneath his searching eye, turn slowly over the pages of thy life. Ah, how can we think of them—*All thine iniquities!* Sins of childhood; sins of youth; sins of company; sins of solitude. Sins that have grown into habits, and have put out the very

eyes with which to see the evil. Years, each with its days, its hours, stamped and stained with records of sin. Sins of wish and thought, of word and act—falseness, foulness, envy, malice. The life darkened, narrowed, accursed by sin—*All thine iniquities!* Sins of doubt, of murmuring, of over-eagerness; independence of God; rebellion against God; God forgotten, ignored. Sins that have said in the heart: "There is no God." Sins of negligence and ignorance; sins of indolence and of passion—*All thine iniquities!* Light quenched; love heedlessly forgotten. Glorious possibilities and promises passed lightly by for emptiest trifles of an hour—*All thine iniquities!* Iniquities that loom so large that even our dim sense of sin can see and mourn them. What, then, of all the life as God sees it? Ah! how do they infinitely multiply on every side, and every sin stands out before him in all its hideous nakedness! And there beside us ever stands the man that might have been, the man after God's own heart—the true, the pure, the Christlike, "the proper man;" beside the man that is—dwarfed, withered, leprous—*All thine iniquities!* Every sin a fact that nothing can undo, nothing can contradict, nothing can hide. Every sin has broken God's eternal law of righteousness. Every sin has robbed God of goods entrusted to our service. Think, too, how that away behind the actual sins, God sees the dreadful sources and springs that lie within us—

the awful possibilities of evil—the things that would have been had opportunity come hand in hand with ill desire.

So, my soul, dost thou stand in the presence of thy Judge. Up out of all that past come ten thousand thousand witnesses that stand pointing at thee and speaking thy guilt. What sayest thou? Alas! we can but plead guilty to it all, feeling within us that the half has not been told; burying the face in our grief, and saying: *I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee.*

Can we ever hope to sing the song of forgiveness?

Yes, verily. But only God himself can teach us that song. It is learnt away in the mount of the Lord. There, hidden in the cleft of the Rock, we may look forth upon all his goodness, and hear him proclaim himself “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious.” Come then, my soul, away into the stillness. Loose thyself from all things else, that thou mayest be alone with God. Let not “the flocks nor herds feed before that mount.” And now, burdened with all thine iniquities, let all that is within thee long for the salvation of thy God. Listen for his own message to thee. We want more than human philosophies of the plan of salvation. We want God’s own revelation made to pass before us, each, perhaps, needing a different vision, a separate word. We want the letter of the truth to come fresh from the very heart of our God; full of his own authority. So, my soul, pray him to

teach and lead thee who is the way and the truth that he may be the life.

Lift up thine eyes to the cross. Ah! my soul, see there the meaning of thy sin as God sees it. *All thine iniquities!* Let it sink down within thee. There is what God thinks of our sin; *that* is how he feels towards it. HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES: THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM. HE WAS OPPRESSED: HE WAS AFFLICTED: HE IS BROUGHT AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER. "All thine iniquities!" Say it over again, and yet again, in sight of all that shame and agony. O my soul, thy pride hath wrought this agony of thy Lord's humiliation; thine anger and hatred have slain the King of Glory! Thy guilty pleasures have been purchased at the cost of his shame and agony and death. What is this that thou hast done?

But look up again, even though it be through thy tears. Let thy inmost heart be open to listen, to look, to adore. *See how thy God wants to forgive thee.* He hath set his heart upon forgiving thee. For thee, as if thou wert the only sinner in the world, for thee he gives his Son, his only Son—his "well-beloved," in whom he is ever "well pleased."

There is a poor, shallow, blind misreading of this wondrous grace that misses its whole heart and empties it of all love; as if the Sovereign Ruler of the universe did but transfer the load of our guilt and shame to his Son, and then claimed the honor

of a forgiveness which another had wrought! Alas! that our thoughts are so coarse, our very hearts so blind, that we can thus degrade the sublimest act of all the ages. The height and depth, the length and breadth of that love that passeth knowledge we can not know. But if we can not behold the *measure*, we can behold the *manner* of the love that the Father hath bestowed upon us—how that the Almighty Father gathered up in himself the sorrow and anguish of his beloved Son. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without his notice. Not a creature in all the world but the Father hath a joy in caring and providing for it. Think, then, of the love that holds the only begotten Son so dear. That love made the grief of the Son the Father's grief. Think, then, how all the shame and agony and curse of Calvary pressed on the heart of the eternal Father! In the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ we see much more than our substitute. There is one who reveals *the very heart of God*. My soul, now mayest thou begin to hope. *All thine iniquities* have not cut thee off from God's help; have not shut thee out from God's love. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Canst thou not begin to find a note of praise? Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

But tarry underneath the cross, and still keep thine eyes upon him who hangeth thereon. Lo, the Son of God hath taken upon himself thy na-

ture—bone of thy bones, and flesh of thy flesh. So is he thy Friend and Kinsman. Thou canst come with boldness unto him. Look yet again, my soul. As surely as he hath taken thy nature, so surely hath he taken thy guilt. He bare our sins in his own body on the tree. It is a fact—the great fact of all time. *In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.* He is come for thy deliverance. Now, my soul, canst thou look up with an adoring gladness. Accepting this great gift of the Father's love, trusting in him as God's way of salvation, thou canst venture to rejoice. *There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.* See, the storm with its blackness and muttering thunder is rolled away; we sit beneath a clear sky. Rest in it. Rejoice in it as thine own. NO CONDEMNATION! It is as when of old the accusers drove the guilty soul into the presence of Christ, whilst they stood with fierce and angry faces and clamored with stormy rage that she be stoned. And she sank down with hidden face at the feet of Jesus. O, blessed Refuge! And he bent over her as if writing promises upon the ground for her downcast eye to read. Then came his words that silenced and confused her enemies. All was hushed; one by one the accusers were all gone. In place of the rough hands of the destroyer, the Master gently touched her, a touch that healed and hallowed all her soul. "Doth no man condemn thee?" he asked. And she lifted her head to find that no finger

pointed at her; no voice condemned her. Only the face of Jesus looked at her with all his gracious pity; only his voice greeted her with words of tenderest blessing. My soul, here at his feet this joy is thine. Be bold to claim it as thine own. "No condemnation!" Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name—
WHO FORGIVETH ALL THINE INIQUITIES.

Muse upon it until the fire kindle, and until the praise wells up within, filling all the soul. Who *forgiveth*—it is a *present* forgiveness. Who goes on forgiving—it is an *abiding* forgiveness. Who doth forgive—it is an *assured* forgiveness. Who *forgiveth all*—it is a *complete* forgiveness. It is my own *separate* and *personal* forgiveness—all *thine* iniquities. Forgiveness—it is blessed to come penitently seeking for it; blessed is it tremblingly to hope for it. It is blessed, though never so timidly, to venture to claim it. What, then, is it to have forgiveness as a possession, an assurance, so deep, so full, that all that is within us can sing about it with a chorus of rapture,—*who forgiveth all thine iniquities*. Love like that of our God can only be satisfied with such a plentiful forgiveness. And guilt like ours can only be delivered from its fears by such a perfect pardon.

Now let the soul exult in it. Surely if anything should be as a very sun of blessedness it is this. Such a gift should never become a dead memory or a vague hope. Forgiven so much at

such a cost, if every breath were praise, and every heart-beat throbbed with gratitude, we could not make enough of such a deliverance. Who can tell from what peril this grace has plucked us? The black and awful mystery of hell is no grim legend of human invention. If those awful words had never fallen from the gracious lips of Jesus, yet surely that cross of Christ were of itself the declaration of some dreadful doom, to save us from which the Son of God himself shrinks from no shame, no agony, no death. And look up, my soul, up into the bright heaven. There is no blessedness of which the very promise and pledge is not given with this gift of the crucified Redeemer—with him also all things are freely thine. He hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; made it over to us for our inheritance, and saith, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne." Such boundless blessedness is thine in him! Rouse thee, then, my soul, to swell the Savior's praise. If anything can kindle enthusiasm, and compel our passionate devotion, surely we should find it in the cross of Christ—WHO FORGIVETH ALL THINE INIQUITIES.

All thine iniquities. The forgiveness must cover *all*, or it were all undone. We can but call upon ourselves not to forget all his benefits; but try to think what should happen if it were possible that God forgot to pardon one of our sins. If by his grace thou hadst been in heaven for many a blessed

day—when lo! there cometh one and knocketh with impatient boldness. “What wouldest thou, sir?” saith the angel at the gate, wondering greatly. And presently he cometh and layeth his hand gently on thy shoulder, “Brother, one would speak with thee.” And lo! there standeth the Accuser of the brethren. “Thou art mine,” saith he; “come with me.” He has been raking over the rubbish-heaps of time and found one sin forgotten, one unforgiven. “Help, Master, help!” rings the cry. Ah, it should never be heaven again. In every heart should creep a chilling fear, “I wonder if one of my sins is forgotten.” The strength and blessedness of our forgiveness lies in its completeness—who forgiveth ALL thine iniquities.

So, then, this is the birthplace of heaven’s music—at the foot of the cross.

Once, when I was away among some mountains, the guide said to me: “There is a wonderful echo here if you can but wake it up. Stand here with your back to this rock, and turn yourself towards that point, and now shout.” I shouted. And from a hundred hollow places came the wonderful responses—far away behind me I heard it rolling in the caves and up amongst the hills; it went ringing across the lake to left of me and right of me; from away at the end of the lake it came back to me, and then away, away, whilst faint echoes of the echoes lingered in the air.

Ah, such an echo is there in the mount of the

Lord if we can but wake it up! Set thy foot firm upon the promises of our God. Set thine eye upon the Crucified. Let all thy soul go forth in deepest love to him who loved thee. And now wake up the music that sleeps on every side—"who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities." *All.* Hark! I hear the music of it ringing away behind me, away over the childhood, over the youth, over the years that are gone—*All* thine iniquities!

Again, set thy foot on the promises, lean against the rock of God's faithfulness, set thine eyes upon the Crucified. Listen! "Who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities." O, music as of heaven, I hear it ringing away to right of me and left of me, away in the dark and gloomy places of the life, away as far as all the influence of my life has gone, sweep the glad tidings—*ALL* thine iniquities!

Try it yet again. Once more, with faith set firmly in the promises of our God, and resting against the rock of his truth, lift thine eyes to the Crucified, and let thine heart adore him. Hear it once again—"who forgiveth *ALL* thine iniquities." O, blessed strains, listen! I hear it away, away for ever and for evermore, gone on to find kindred melodies in heaven itself. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

IV.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who healeth all thy diseases.”—PSA. CIII, 1, 3.

THESE words seem to have a double meaning. The first has reference to the health of the body. But the position of the words, wedged as they are between a triumphant consciousness of forgiveness and an adoring wonder at God's redeeming grace, suggests another and deeper meaning. Let us think of each.

Bless the Lord, O my soul . . . who healeth all thy diseases of body. This is another instance of David's common sense. Poetry is apt to be sentimental. It often plays with dainty ideas, but shrinks from contact with common things as vulgar, and hence its gratitude can not stoop low enough to sing of the Hand that heals its pain. And not poetry only; there are many people with whom religion itself is a soft and sweet sentimentalism—a thing not of robust ideas, but of lovely feelings; not of sturdy endurance and earnest life, but of dreams and visions. David was not one of these. His muse is like the lark, that soars to heaven's gate, and yet it builds its nest on the very earth,

amidst the nodding grasses or the young corn, and in the intervals of its singing stoops to homeliest work. In the twenty-third Psalm this strong common sense makes itself felt in a way that would startle us if the words were not so familiar: Yea, 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. Then at once, without a break or pause, he goes on: *Thou preparest a table before me*; as if to say: "But, my Lord, I do not want to think of thee as waiting for me on there until I get to that dark valley. I want thee *here* as much as *there*—*now* as much as *then*; not only by and by in death, but at my dinner-table to-day I would see thy gracious Presence, and from thy hands I would take my daily bread."

Happy he who has learnt this lesson. He misses many of the brightest and most blessed revelations of our God who can not see him in the least and commonest mercies of the daily life. His angels praise him in the heights—rapturous and sublime is their music; but not less sweet are the strains that float about us if we have but ears to hear them. *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.* The gift and grace of praise is to have the eye anointed so as to see God everywhere; to have the heart so attuned and sensitive that it shall answer to every touch and breath of God's love.

Who healeth all thy diseases. Whether faith heal

us or physic, yet is the healing a gift of God, and one of his best gifts. The words remind us of *our dependence upon the minute ministry of nature*. We limit our public thanksgiving service to the harvest—perhaps in the same way that Sundays stand out from the days of the week, and as the sacred Supper stands out from all other meals—types and representatives of the rest, in consecrating which we consecrate the whole. But it is well to remember that there are ten thousand merciful arrangements that daily minister to us which are as necessary as the corn. Think for a moment of the air we breathe. Isaiah in his lofty way touches upon the greatness of this gift: Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; *he that giveth breath unto the people upon it*. If we could have thought of it before we began to breathe, the boldest man amongst us would never have ventured to do it. We should have argued it thus: “I must live by breathing; I shall require some twenty breaths a minute; every breath needs a renewing of the delicate compound upon which my life depends. There are sixty minutes in every hour, and twenty-four hours in every day, and three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. Why, I shall want miles of air for myself! And then there are to be millions, hundreds of millions, of other people to be supplied, each consuming and each defiling that which must be re-

newed. Where can it come from? And then this breathing has to go on whether we are busy or not—how can I manage to be always thinking about it? And whatever shall I do if I fall asleep? No, it is no use for me to think of it—I shall forget, or make a mistake, or the supply will fail me!” Ah! so our timid thought would have whispered. But this great mystery of breathing goes on so easily—the air so constantly supplied that probably most men have never thought of it. Day and night, summer and winter, in crowded cities, amid all kinds of defilement, the supply is kept up every moment, and we are so confident of its coming that we lie down and sleep utterly untroubled. It is the gift of God—a Godlike gift; so free, so vast, so perfectly adapted to its purpose, unfailing, wonderful.

Think again of the elements that lie in our daily food, which can build up such variety of matter as our bodies require—the bones, the pillars of the house; the sturdy muscles, the bands of sinews, the delicate nerves. Think that amidst the tremendous forces that are about us, so dainty a bit of mechanism as the human frame should be preserved unhurt—a set of the most delicate hinges and springs, such exquisitely sensitive apparatus as the ear, the eye, the brain, and with perils and diseases lurking on every side. Let us thank God for health. There are some unhappy people who always dwell in the flat and misty region of the melancholy middlings: “How are you?” we ask; and the answer is, “Just

middling.” Most of them mean that they are *well—very well—very well indeed*; and the least thing they can do is to say so, and to thank God for it.

Then again the words suggest, *the healing ministry of nature*. That in the great world with its majesty and wonder, God not only stoops to array it with sweet flowers gladdening the eye with beauty of shape and color, and breathing sweetness into the air which they purify, but he has set in roots and fruits and juices that which relieves the pain, or heals the wound, or strengthens the weak, or soothes the brain. So do all things reach forth hands of ministry—fields and flowers and trees, and the dull, inanimate earth itself. Bless the Lord, O my soul . . . who healeth all thy diseases.

But there comes another question: If God be the Giver of health, why are there any sick? What is the meaning of pain, and all the dreadful sufferings that some endure?

Not always, not always *at once*, does God heal all our diseases. As earth ministers to our sickness, so in turn does our sickness minister to us. Partly for your sake, my brother, and for mine, are there those who suffer; therefore let us be ever careful to pay the suffering their dues in all tenderness and help.

They open our eyes to our mercies. As when of old Christ and his disciples passed the blind man who sat and begged, lifting up the sad face towards

the group, and the disciples asked, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Very noteworthy is the answer of Jesus: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; *but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*" His blindness was to give them the gift of sight. There were works of God to which the blind man was to open their eyes. This is always true of sickness and of suffering. We scarcely think of our gift of sight until we see the blind. Think how infinitely poorer the ages had been if when Christ came upon earth there were no sufferers—no sick and blind and lame. What room had his pity for its manifestations but in their need? How else could he have shown forth his love and power, but for their sorrows? There are tender words and memories of Jesus which draw us resistlessly to him, and which compel our love and inspire our faith, that we never could have known but for these sufferers. For ever are we their debtors. And do not let us think that the ministry of the sick and suffering—their ministry to us—is needless to-day. Who has not seen how it softens and refines and purifies; how it enriches us with tenderness and sympathy? Often has some little sufferer in the house seemed to open heaven; selfishness and coarseness have died in that purer atmosphere; the very tones, the looks, the services have caught another spirit that has made the sick chamber as a room in the Palace Beautiful.

I know that we may just give in to suffering or to sickness, and grow only peevish, fretful, selfish; daily more embittered and complaining—a thing that withers hope and trust. So it may be. Or, on the other hand, sickness and suffering may touch and ennoble the soul into almost an angel presence. God gives us grace and opportunity, but what we make of them it is only ours to determine. Of this be sure, that if God does not heal his child, it is because there is something better than healing, some development of endurance, of patience, of trust; some greatness and grace of the soul which only thus he can put us in possession of. There shall be compensation somewhere for every throb and pain. Our Father's hand of love directs and controls the machinery by which he shapes us, and these afflictions work out in us, or for us, a far more exceeding *weight of glory*. "Perfect through sufferings," it is written of the well-beloved Son, our Lord—as if suffering brought to Christ his great endowment by which he ever lives to help and comfort all sad hearts. And may it not be that amongst those who are sent forth to minister are needed some made most like unto their Lord by these same processes of suffering, for whom the angels of wisdom and power must make way?

So shall it be that we shall praise God one day for the sicknesses as well as for the healing. Nor need we be anxious to know the reason of our suffering—not to know is only to leave the

larger room for trust. Let us be anxious only that God shall have his own way with us perfectly.

“But if Himself he come to thee, and stand,
 And reach to thee Himself the holy cup
 (With all its wreathen stems of passion-flowers
 And quivering sparkles of the ruby stars),
 Pallid and royal, saying: ‘Drink with Me;’
 Wilt thou refuse? Nay, not for Paradise!
 Hold fast his hand

Though the nails pierce thine too! take only care
 Lest one drop of the sacramental wine
 Be spilled, of that which ever shall unite
 Thee, soul and body, to thy living Lord!”

* * * * *

And yet in sickness and in suffering this may be our song—*he healeth all thy diseases*. If not now, yet some time, and that soon. Our Master hath an old doctor, very clever. A little rough at times, perhaps, as skillful doctors are apt to be, and at the first his patients are afraid of him, but only at the first. It matters not to him what the ailing is, or of how long standing. Nor is his remedy a long and costly process—one touch of his hand, and they whose sins are forgiven at once can sing of him who healeth all their diseases. See the patients as they come to his house—the pale faces, the shriveled forms, the withered limbs, the dull-eyed that stumble groping their way, the dull-eared that none can direct. So they troop to

him. And lo! they step forth again made whole. Eyes that flash in their gladness, beholding the King in his beauty. Ears on which breaks the music of the Celestial City. Old saints who have forgotten their ailments, and who run up with joy the shining way to see and praise their Lord.

Who is this skillful doctor? His name is Death. We think sometimes that he puts an end to life. Nay, he does but lead us into the fuller and forever blessed life. Did not the Lord once take the clay and lay it on the blind man's eyes that he might see? It was but the gracious hint and whisper of how that one day the clay should be laid upon us for our healing; not for decay, as we deem, but for our perfect deliverance.

So then, my soul, this note of praise is thine, either in possession or to be borrowed from what shall be: "Bless the Lord, O my soul . . . who healeth all thy diseases."

But further—the position and context of these words suggest a deeper meaning. *Bless the Lord, O my soul; who forgiveth all thine iniquities*—but the psalmist can not stop there. Within us is the black source of sin, touching and defiling everything. There is the blindness that can not see God's presence, the deafness to his voice, the paralysis of our energies in his service; there is the true leprosy defiling us, the fire of passion that consumes us; there are the evil things that

master us and lead us captive. We can not be contented with forgiveness. Our gracious Lord can not suffer us to rest there. At once our faith and hope go on to claim the further blessing which he waits to bestow. *Who healeth all thy diseases.* He forgives only that he may cure all the sickness of the soul.

My soul, set before thee in all its glorious fullness that which thy Lord is come to do for thee. He is come not only to save from hell, or to take to heaven, or to make forgiveness possible; far more glorious than this is the purpose of his coming. He is come to undo in me all the mischief of the fall; to restore me to a perfect moral wholeness; to re-create within me the very likeness and image of God; to fulfill in me the claims of the law towards God and towards my neighbor and toward all things. It is good to get at Christ's feet and to let this thought go sinking down into us, kindling desire and expectation—that the Lord is come, is here, is within my reach, *on purpose to heal all my diseases.*

There are some good people who are frightened at the word *perfection*. When it has to do with our glorious Lord, we may be much more amazed that we dare think of anything less. *Perfect art thou in all thy ways.* And is his perfection to stop short at grass-blades and primroses or suns and stars? and is it never to be so much as named in the great work of redemption?

And of all quaint things that were ever uttered, surely the very oddest is to hear poor Little Faith protesting that it is needful for us to have some little sin to keep us humble! O Little Faith, pray God to forgive thee such a thought—as if indeed the great Captain of our salvation had to call in the evil one to complete and perfect his work. A little sin to keep us humble! A little sin, indeed! Why not much sin, that we may be *very* humble? Alas for us if we hope to find our stock of humility from that prince of hell whose pride was his destruction! Nay my soul, be not afraid to sing this song with a triumphant boldness—WHO HEALETH ALL THY DISEASES. The fever of worldliness that burns in our blood; the ill-temper, the unkindness, the impatience that cover us as with boils and blains in God's sight; the dullness and sloth, that disease of the bones; the dreadful malady of avarice which turns the heart to stone; the pride, of all sins at once most hateful and most fruitful—he is come to set the crooked things within us straight, the crooked tempers, the crooked words, the crooked ways—all that is not exactly true and level. He is come to cure the dim vision of himself, the fretting fear, the foolish envy. And that not as a work for which he has to go out of his way. It is his very purpose and desire, for which he has made all provision—as easy and direct and natural is it to him as the forgiveness of our sins. The one leads on

directly to the other. We need not wait. He who has done the one waits to do the other. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities*—that is thy boast and thy song. Then let this come next, as fully and as blessedly thine own—*who healeth all thy diseases*.

But this song, like the other, is learnt only in the presence of the Lord and in sight of the cross. We know too well that this disease of sin deadens the very will. We must kindle the fire of our longing at the feet of our crucified Lord. Then when we learn what grief and shame our sins have caused our Lord, do we hate them and long to be rid of them. Think, my soul, of thy Lord's purity—how loathsome in his sight is that of which we make so little. What a grief and what an offense is my sin to him, since I am his and he is mine. What a peril, too, since I am called by his name, and entrusted with the keeping of my Master's glory.

And let desire lead on to *confident claiming*. Cast thyself at his feet, as if to stay him until the work is done. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He who knows us through and through, bending ever in tenderest compassion, he who loves us infinitely, he who hath all power in heaven and in earth, shall put forth his hand and touch us. *I will; be thou clean*. And so may we, too, come to sing the sweet music of this song: *Bless the Lord, O my soul; who healeth all thy diseases*.

V.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who redeemeth thy life from destruction.”—PSAL. CIII, 1, 4.

Do NOT let us hesitate to look back upon this Psalm through the life and death of our glorious Savior. If we can see in these words more than David saw in them, then shall they only be the better fitted at once to stimulate and to utter our praise. To us, for whom the Old Testament is lit up with the golden splendor of the Savior's presence, it can not be but that a new and infinite wealth is revealed in many of its teachings. But in this case there is no reason to doubt that David meant by these words all that we have come to associate with them. Reading them lightly over, it is quite easy to think that he is thanking God for sparing his bodily life—that he is celebrating here his temporal mercies: he healeth all thy diseases; he redeemeth thy life from destruction; he satisfieth thy mouth with good things. And whatever else the words may mean, do not let us think that these great mercies were for a moment overlooked or made light of. It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty to give thanks for these most

gracious gifts. But there is a reference here to something more than temporal and bodily good. The word *redeemed* was a sacred word. In a host of ways the law of Israel has claimed and consecrated it to the service of God. David, whose delight was in that law, whilst meditating day and night, could not fail to know its sacred meaning. *He redeemeth*—it is one of the great foundation words on which our holy religion rests. It runs through the Bible, from Adam lingering at the gate of Paradise, to the dazzling scenes in the Book of the Revelation. The first promise to the fallen world and the great theme of the saints in glory is redemption. *Redeemeth*—there are words like the pebbles that one sometimes picks up by the seashore—nothing outside to mark them off from others; but you break them, and within is a grotto of flashing gems—from roof and floor reach crystals that lead away into depths of beauty. Such a word is this. At the heart of it lie Bethlehem and Nazareth and Calvary. The cross is there, and he who hath redeemed us with his precious blood.

The idea of redemption met the Jew everywhere, and everywhere with the same meaning—*deliverance by payment of a ransom price*. The law claimed from the Jew the firstborn alike of his sons and of his cattle; and they had to be redeemed, bought back. The word occurs again and again, and always with one meaning. It ran all through the Jewish arrangements, in social life, in

civil life, and in the religion which controlled each of these. Then Christ comes, and at once the word with all its traditional significance and its fullness of meaning is applied to him. He is the Redeemer. His precious blood is the ransom price. We are redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. So the Lord Jesus speaks of himself—he is the Son of man come to give himself a ransom for many.

Our glorious Lord has many titles even as he has many offices, but here is that which is the fullest and most blessed of them all—*the Lord thy Redeemer*. Whatever else he is and can be, it could avail us nothing unless in him we have redemption. It is well to sing of him in loftiest strains as the Creator that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. But, alas! better creation had never been if there be no redemption.

It is well to think of the Lord as the all-perfect Man, to lift our eyes from this shattered humanity, degraded and defiled, and to see him as God's ideal Man. It is well to think of this same human nature amidst our coarse surroundings, and yet to find in it a love that never failed; a lofty aim that never in a moment of forgetfulness or weakness wrought other than the perfect will of God. But without

redemption, all that is at once our despair and our condemnation.

We follow him as the Wonder-worker—opening blind eyes, casting out devils, raising the dead. But what if that be all? Those palsied limbs shall shake again beneath the weight of gathering years. Death shall lay his fingers on those flashing orbs and undo the miracle, and shall come again to claim the rescued as his prey, and boast himself the very “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” Nothing that Christ is, nothing that he has done, can avail us anything without redemption. All his titles are worthy of his renown, but this, this only, makes him mine and makes me his—*the Lord my Redeemer*.

And this title at once brings him lowest and exalts him highest. It spreads like the rainbow—an arch that rests on Bethlehem and Calvary; but lo! its summit reaches to the highest heaven, and spans the Great White Throne. As the Redeemer he lies a babe in the manger; as the Redeemer he hangs accursed on the cross; and as the Redeemer there is given unto him a name that is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. All else leads up to this: he heals the body that men may know that he hath power on earth to forgive sins. He is a Prophet, only to proclaim himself a Savior. He is a King, that he may dispense the pardon which he himself has purchased. And as leading up to this, the

lesser offices have passed away. No longer does he stand in our midst as the Teacher; no more does he startle or awe us with miracles. But he *ever* liveth to make intercession for us. He has suffered many things and entered into his glory—this highest glory of forgiving sins.

Well then may this be the constant topic of the Scriptures. Prophecy can not turn away from this great sight—the Son of God wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities—and then exalted . . . a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance . . . and remission of sins. Altar and sacrifice, type and history, alike point on to and prepare for this. Patriarch and prophet, priest and apostle, unite in declaring that in him we have redemption through his blood. This is at once the dawn of earth's hope and the fullness of heaven's joy. The voices of the thousands round about the throne swell the rapture of this song: *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood.*

My soul, well may this be the subject of thy sweetest praise: WHO REDEEMETH THY LIFE FROM DESTRUCTION.

Let men look at this wonderful Life as they may, there is but one explanation of it which is in keeping either with its mystery or with our need. Sorrow and suffering like his can find no warrant, love like his can find no purpose, short of our redemption.

It is said that Christ died in order that he

might share all the sufferings of our humanity, even the last; that we might have his sympathy to comfort us; and that he might be in all points one with us. True, blessedly true; and never now is there a sorrow but he knows its bitterness; never now is there a step we have to take but his footprint is left deep-dinted in the way. But if that were all, the Scripture must be altered. We must read that Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death *with* every man. That he laid down his life *with* the sheep. There is another word that goes far beyond this and gives it a vastly deeper meaning—Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just *for* the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse *for* us. He gave himself a ransom *for* all.

Again, it is said that Christ's crucifixion was accepted and endured in order that he might give to his teaching the force and the sacredness that spring from martyrdom, sealing with his blood that which he taught. But what was the teaching that he thus confirmed? He himself declares the great purpose of his coming: The Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom. I lay down my life for the sheep. To make his death mean less than this is surely to deny the Lord that bought us.

And yet again, it is said that the death of the Lord Jesus completed a life of self-surrender to the will of God; that Christ has taught us thus

the great lesson of self-sacrifice—how that we must die to self that we may live to God. True, perfectly true. But what makes it the Father's will? It can not be that the Father delights in such pain and agony and dreadful death as that of the cross. Again Christ himself gives us the answer: Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life. I lay down my life for the sheep. He dies that in Him we may have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

This mercy, too, like all these mercies, can only be seen rightly in the cross of our Lord Jesus. Let us come near filled with adoring praise as we perceive the love of God in that he hath laid down his life for us. Let us tarry in sight of this infinite gift, thinking afresh of the destruction from which he hath redeemed us, and of the vastness of that ransom price; exulting in the boundless privilege and possession which are ours now, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The law of redemption was for those who had "waxen poor" and fallen into decay. (Lev. xxv, 47.) The Jew whose fortunes had fallen low had to give up his possessions to the creditor. See here the old home amongst the hills; the olives with their silver gray; the ever-changing vineyards. In the valley runs the singing brook, and about it the corn is ripening, or the cattle feed in the pastures gay with a thousand flowers. Away on the hills

wander the flocks of sheep. All is sunny, peaceful, prosperous. But now begins a series of troubles. The bleak winter lingers far into the spring. Then comes a drought. Pastures are withered; the brook is dried up; the fig-tree does not blossom; the olive fails; the vine does not yield her fruit; the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls. At last the evil day is come. All is given up to the rich creditor, and the man himself goes forth, homeless and forlorn. Bad leads to worse, and fallen lower still, he must sell himself and become a bondservant. Ancient name, noble ancestry, lofty hopes, and splendid memories—all these availed him nothing. He is a slave.

My soul, see here a picture of thy low estate. Of such high origin, made to have dominion, thou art waxen poor and fallen into decay. *Sold under sin*—slave to a thousand fears, a thousand cares, a thousand things of ill; loathing thy bondage, and yet unable to strike any blow for thy freedom.

If the man be able, he may redeem himself—so ran the law. But what if he be not able? What if the wearied slave be worn out in the service of his master, what then can he do toward his own ransom? “Without strength” is the doleful summary of our case: wishing and purposing; but, alas! how to perform that which is good, we find not.

Then said the law: If the man have a rich brother, or an uncle, or an uncle’s son, or any near of kin, then is there hope for him. Moving

at once the pity and the help of such a kinsman he may find a redeemer who shall pay down the ransom, and at once the man is free. But alas! what hope for him if in every kinsman he finds a fellow-slave! If all the family be waxen poor and fallen into decay, what then? Such is our bondage. Sin has passed upon all men, . . . and death by sin. None stands amongst us who is able to free us. Whence then can come this rich kinsman?

In HIM we have redemption! That he may be next of kin to every one of us, the Son of God becomes the Son of man. Born a little Babe, he hangs upon the bosom of an earthly mother—the blessed Brother of every one of us. Bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh—made in all points like as we are—to none is he nearer of kin than to thee, my soul. Here is the dawn of hope.

But is he rich, this near Kinsman, and can he redeem us? Money might redeem the land, the house, the person of the Jew from his poverty; but here is sin with all its curse; the broken law with all its penalty! What price can avail in this case? O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! For us this near Kinsman makes himself an offering. He gives himself a ransom. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Now, my soul, be bold to claim thine heritage. The moment the ransom price was paid the redeemed was free—the law that condemned now defended him. Off went

the rags of the slave, and the fetter was broken; the best robes were his again now, and the ornament of gold. The old position was his; the old home was his own again. All was his, as freely and as fully as it ever had been. My soul, with wondering gratitude count up thy wealth of blessedness in thy Redeemer. Thy first freedom and thy dominion perfectly restored, now are all things thine. Thine is the Father's house in its fullness of joy. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people . . . that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us." Claim all the fullness of thy complete redemption. Let not sin have dominion over thee, since thou art the redeemed of the Lord. Let not the enemy defraud thee of any part of thine estate, since it has been purchased at so great a cost and so freely made over to thee. Now let heaven's music ring in the soul, and all that is within us swell the chorus of the redeemed. BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL: AND ALL THAT IS WITHIN ME, BLESS HIS HOLY NAME . . . WHO REDEEMETH THY LIFE FROM DESTRUCTION.

VI.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”—PSAL. CIII, 1, 4.

HOW GREAT is the love of our God since it takes so much to satisfy him!

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities—this surely is more than we could venture to ask or think—such a free, such a complete forgiveness, and at such a cost. But his love can not rest there. *He healeth all thy diseases*—dries up the black sources of evil within us, the bitter and poisonous springs. *He redeemeth thy life from destruction* by such a ransom price, buys us out of our cruel bondage, and restores us to the dignity and joy of our first estate. But all this is not enough. His great love flows on, cherishing yet further and more glorious purposes concerning us. *He crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.* Well may we stir ourselves to a new exercise of gratitude. Bless the Lord, O *my* soul: and all that is within *me*, bless his holy name. It is not for David only. It is not for a privileged few by whom this song is to be sung. My soul may claim it as its own, and “all that is within me” may ring it out triumphantly. Come then, my soul, bring yet a fuller, sweeter note of wondering and adoring joy—that God, even thy God, should to all his

mercies add yet this above all—*He crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*

THIS IS THE COMPLETION AND PERFECTION OF FORGIVENESS.

Think what forgiveness *may* mean. To forgive is often pride's supremest triumph. To be forgiven may be the offender's bitterest humiliation. It may mean a foe trodden down and beaten, and at last, when the conquering might is magnified, and the helplessness of the enemy is made patent to the world—*then* the conqueror stoops haughtily to forgive. *Forgiveness*—it may mean, and often does mean, that which is wrung from an unwilling heart by great entreaty, tears, and hardships; or it is bought by bribes and bitter terms. And when most virtuous and most complete, forgiveness is held as a favor that must be rightly asked for, and having given it, the giver counts that he has done all that generosity itself requires. This is forgiveness between equals such as we are.

It is good, it is wonderful, to turn from this and to think how God forgiveth. He, King of kings and Lord of lords, it is amazing that he forgiveth at all. Forgiveness implies a certain eminence in the offender. Even our poor humanity can think of those who might be beneath one's forgiveness—to whom we can not stoop to have such intercourse as even offense or forgiveness implies. Think then, of him, the Most High God, whom we have wronged,

we poor dependents on his bounty for life and breath and all things—HE FORGIVETH. And forgiveth by himself stooping to all humiliation, and tears, and agony. He cometh himself to provide forgiveness, and meets us with it, and himself entreats our acceptance of it at his hands.

Amongst us let us hope there is no wrong which by God's grace we could not forgive; but it is easy to think of wrongs of which forgiveness should be conditional. "Yes, I forgive—I forgive; but only if you keep out of my sight. Never let me see you again, or the sight will bring back all the bitter memory of my wrong and kindle again the fire of my indignation and hatred." O my soul, think again of what thy sin means to thy God! Think of all that it has cost him—what bitterness of anguish! the cross and all the accursed death of Calvary! *He forgiveth*—yes; but what then? That I must go forth from the presence of the Lord, burdening him no more with memories of his shame and sorrow? No—forgiven only that he may set his love upon me, and lift me up, and honor me,—that he may *crown me with lovingkindness and tender mercies*.

Beautiful and true are the words:

"A man's forgiveness may be true and sweet,
 But yet he stoops to give it; more complete
 Is Love that lays forgiveness at thy feet,
 And pleads with thee to raise it. *Only Heaven*
Means CROWNED not vanquished when it says "forgiven."

The very completeness and perfection of God's forgiveness this—HE CROWNETH *thee with loving-kindness.*

Redeemed and crowned.—Well may this twofold blessing move our praise, since it kindles the rapture and inspires the chorus of heaven itself. In that dazzling vision, most splendid, perhaps, of all that human eyes ever looked upon, St. John sees him who sitteth upon the throne, the Lamb as it had been slain. And before him fall the circling ranks of those that are round about the King, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors; and they sing a song that is forever new: THOU WAST SLAIN, AND HAST REDEEMED US TO GOD BY THY BLOOD; . . . AND HAST MADE US . . . KINGS AND PRIESTS; AND WE SHALL REIGN ON THE EARTH. And so beginning, the song goes forth with swelling fullness, ever growing until it wakens all the voices of all worlds, and then sweeps back again, a universal rapture of adoration. "Every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying: BLESSING, AND HONOR, AND GLORY, AND POWER, BE UNTO HIM THAT SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND UNTO THE LAMB FOR EVER AND EVER." My soul, exercise thyself in these strains of celestial music, and with heart tuned by the finger of God be always praising him. That which inspires heaven's music may well fill us with grateful adoration. Bless the Lord, O my soul,

. . . who forgiveth all thine iniquities, . . .
who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who
crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender
mercies.

Forgiven, healed, redeemed, and crowned. These great and wondrous gifts of grace follow each other with a suddenness and fullness like the blessings that were showered upon Joseph of old. We may find in his story that which helps us to see them in a clearer light.

Here in the dim light of the dungeon, foul and loathsome, he sits, laden with fetters, with coarse and brutal company—his misery made a thousand-fold more bitter by the memory of his own innocence, with hope itself swallowed up in the gloom. Now night, pitiful night, brings even here her kindly gift of sleep, and flings her release of forgetfulness over the prisoners. Then suddenly startling him, the dungeon doors are thrown open; the light of many lamps dazzles him. His name is spoken with an honor that he has not heard for many a day. Bewildered at the meaning of it all, he is hurried forth from the prison. In eager haste they take off the rags; they remove the cruel fetters; they anoint him with fragrant oils; they put upon him courtly robes, and then they bring him in before the mighty Pharaoh himself. And lo! ere ever the day has dawned, a prisoner no more, he is a prince, arrayed in vesture of finest linen,

decked with the golden chain of royal favor, riding in the chariot next to the king, with all the people kneeling before him in lowly homage, he is crowned with authority as ruler over all the land.

That was a transition swift and splendid, as when black night gives place to dawn of day with gold and purple and blessing everywhere. But that, with all its suddenness and splendor, is quite as much a contrast as it is an illustration when we set it beside the list of mercies that are celebrated in this song. Joseph was a prisoner for virtue's sake, but against us is the record of numberless sins. Joseph by his wisdom saved a nation and fed a world; but we, alas! have no merit, no claim. Great as his honors were, yet Joseph had but the rewards and dignities that the king could bestow with a word—they cost the giver nothing. But our advancement is the price of tears and dreadful shame and death. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name; . . . who forgiveth all thine iniquities; . . . who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

Nor does the contrast end here. Joseph's crown passed to another brow. The scepter fell from his hand; his authority was gone. There arose a king that knew not Joseph. But for thee, my soul, the gift is of an eternal kingship, an

inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us who are kept by the power of God.

HE CROWNETH. *What is the crown?*—God deals not with outward trappings, golden crowns and purple robes and jeweled scepters. He gives the true kingliness which these things do but signify, but which they can not bestow; and lacking which, these outside things do only mock the discrowned, disrobed, unkingly man within. What, then, is the crown?

We have seen that this Psalm brings out the great purposes of our salvation. The glory of our redemption is not so much as glanced at if we think of it as only the means by which God saves us from hell, or takes us to heaven. God redeems us only that he may lead us up to possess our high position and our first inheritance. This is the one great purpose of Christ's coming, of his life and death and resurrection—*that he may set us right toward all things*—right toward God, and right toward ourselves, and right toward the world, and right toward eternity. And he who is thus set right is crowned, a king in very deed, earth's truest king.

Think that once man stood in this same world, the youngest child of God, the heir and king of all the earth. He was crowned with glory and honor, with all things put under his feet. What was the

strength of this authority? What made this kingship? He had no palace; no royal robes; no outward tokens of his sovereignty. He bare no lofty titles, and had no retinue of followers to swell his pomp. Sin has added to his knowledge, and through the fall he lost no mental and no physical faculty. What then has he lost that he parted with his high dominion? Man's crown and kingship was in this—his perfect harmony with him who is the King of kings; his perfect obedience to that will which is the strength and end of all law. This was man's crown and kingship—that mind and heart and life were one in waiting upon God and in his service. Down through the man went the great principle of God's own righteousness—and it made him strong and true as a pillar of God's own temple. And in him ever reigned the will of God, and the doing of that will crowned him with glory and honor.

Then came the tempter with his promise of *independence*. And man set up his will against God's will, and at once was overwhelmed in ruin. The crown was gone, the robe was rent, the man was dragged down, the slave of lust, of fear, of circumstance; and all within him was strife and confusion. And now Christ is come to redeem us and to win back for us our high position that we may be crowned again. Let the fair vision of this great salvation rise before us in all its beauty. This is the one end and purpose of the salvation

that God has provided for us—to restore again this unity with himself, to make his righteousness and will again supreme and absolute within us, and so to gird us with a divine authority—thus to make us kings. This is what Christ is come to do for thee, O my soul! Expect it, claim it as thine own. Exult in it with songs of praise. Listen to the language of a man who had tested the truth of his words amidst every possible temptation, a man of fierce and fiery passion. Listen to the boast of one who had come face to face with all the grimmest foes that can defy us—gaunt famine; persecution like a fierce-eyed beast of prey; distress and peril in a hundred hideous forms gathered like ravening wolves about him; all that his pride and youthful ambition had held most sacred, accounted him now its most hated enemy; yet he stands every inch a king, and cries: “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. . . . I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” My soul, this is for thee. Do not rest until thou hast proved it as thine own. This crown of a complete and continuous victory is held out to thee. To seek it is to find—to seek it though with many a blunder and with much of blindness. Through Christ it is thine. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

He crowneth us, as kings and conquerors over sin. There is a word in St. John's Gospel—a noble word, fit for kings—"As many as received him, to them gave he *authority* to become the sons of God." For us he hath gone forth with garments dyed in blood; for us he hath gone out to meet the mighty foe that had taken us captive and spoiled us of our goods. And now we wait at the watch-tower of the city of Mansoul for the issue of that battle. And lo, the herald crieth: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." And as the bolts are flung back, here standeth the great Captain of our salvation; and he setteth again upon us the crown of pure gold, and he giveth us "authority to become the sons of God." But note well, our restored kingship is only in receiving him who hath overcome for us. And when he dwells within us, we too are more than conquerors; strengthened by his might, we too can do all things. Thus, and thus only, is the crown and kingship ours, in receiving him who is the King of kings to dwell and reign in our hearts. He comes to make us strong with his own strength; to make us true with his own truth; to make us good with his own goodness. He hath redeemed us that now and here he may make us kings and priests unto God. *Bless the Lord, O my soul . . . who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.*

VII.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”—PSA. CIII, 1, 5.

THE meaning is not quite what it seems to be. The word here rendered *mouth*, in eleven other places is rendered *ornament*. Here and in the thirty-second Psalm it is translated *mouth*: “Whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle.” Various meanings have been given to the word in different translations. The Syriac rendering is *thy body*, the Seventy give it as *thy desire*, the Chaldean as *thy old age*. Wordsworth’s exposition embodies that which is the only satisfactory idea—“the sense seems to be thy *ornament*, that which is thy glory, thy spirit.” It were no satisfaction unless the spirit were satisfied. The Lord satisfieth that which is the very home and center of satisfaction—the inner man, the spirit. It is not at all a strange thing that the psalmist should thus poetically allude to the spirit as the ornament and distinguishing glory of our nature. “*Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name . . . who satisfieth thee with goodness.*”

I. LET US THINK OF MAN AS THE UNSATISFIED.

There are many definitions of man as distinguishing him from all other animals that dwell upon the earth. He is "the forward-looking creature," as the wise old Greeks called him. He is the animal that lights a fire, that cooks his food, that clothes himself. But there is a definition of man which is fuller and truer than any of these, touching points of distinction that lie deeper and rise higher than any of these, and that mark him off much more sharply. Of all creatures on the earth man alone is *the unsatisfied*. If we could but get at the source of his dissatisfaction we should find not the weakness, not the littleness of the man, but his greatness. This sublime discontent is the evidence at once of his origin and destiny. This is the lofty distinction which separates the man from all other creatures about him. Like them in everything else—taken as they are out of the earth; composed of the same substances, with similar organs; the development of a type which runs down to some of the lowest forms; dwelling in the midst of the same surroundings; dependent on the same sources of supply; breathing a common air; nourished by a common food; yet in this man stands ever apart and alone—*earth can not satisfy him*. He is fitted far more perfectly than any other creature to secure the supply of his wants. To him is given dominion over the earth.

He is able to fetch from distant lands his daily bread; to plan and arrange for the future; to arm himself with a strength greater than that of the fiercest beasts; to guard against extremes of heat and cold; to secure a regular and suitable supply of food; to surround himself with safety from the perils and discomforts to which other creatures are liable—and yet he alone is the unsatisfied. All else can find in the earth all that they need; there is no want that earth can not meet, no desire that it can not gratify. What is it that dooms man to be more unhappy than the beasts that perish? What is it within him which outpasses earth, and stands wondering and afraid, looking into the infinite and the eternal? Infinite! eternal!—if of the earth only, how have we come by these ideas and the words which express them? If man is but the top and crown of an animal existence, why can not he find enough in the earth from which he is taken? That which sufficed for his origin surely can suffice for his maintenance. He is not more dull to perceive, nor more slow to avail himself of nature's provisions, than other creatures. Why, then, can he not find his supply and lie down? What means the wail of humanity that goes up from every age—the wail not of the outcast; not the bitter cry of the starved, the beaten, the perishing slaves of grinding toil; but the bitter cry of humanity surrounded by life's luxuries; the wail of humanity "clothed in purple and fine linen,"

and faring "sumptuously every day?" What does that mean? The dissatisfaction and wretchedness of humanity, not drunken and ignorant, but of humanity cultured, humanity waited upon by the ministry of the arts and of music, and all that the mind delights in!

How comes it that here the soul sits vexed and fretted by a plenty that leaves it so full of wants; wearied by pleasures that lie outside it only and far away; burdened by possessions that are at once so heavy and so empty; muttering amidst the splendor: "*I perish with hunger?*" How do we account for it? It is no explanation to say that his greatness is the cause of his want and weariness. If only of the earth, how does he come by a greatness that earth can not satisfy? What is it that urges him out beyond the horizon, flying under other skies, in utter loneliness over the dreary waste of waters, half in hope and half in fear, forever unable to find rest for the sole of his foot? Is there any account anywhere that can explain the existence of a creature so strange, so exceptional, as man? There is only one. It is in the Bible: that Book of God, and Book of man. "Of the earth, earthy," in common with all creatures, yet in man there is a spirit breathed of God which only God can satisfy. And so apart from God he is ever the unsatisfied. No *thing* can satisfy him: no piled-up heaps of worlds with all the wealth and dominion of them. His cry finds its only interpretation in

the Scripture: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

II. LET US THINK OF GOD SATISFYING THE SOUL WITH GOODNESS.

Are there not occasions of which we all are conscious, when we seem to come into contact with things that touch the hidden depths within us—moments when the soul looks forth and feels that out that way somewhere lies its satisfaction? We can think of the sprouting seed within the dark earth, dimly conscious of the life that might be—sturdy growth of branch, and dainty leafage and luscious fruit—feeling that just above it is the light and glory that it longs for, and groping its way upward. So do mysterious influences meet the dullest of us and suggest the existence somewhere of that which can satisfy. Does not scenery thus sometimes play upon us—the stretch of "dreary, dreary moorland," and the stillness unbroken except by the curlew's plaintive cry; or the expanse of wooded landscape, hushed and rich in a thousand varied charms, finished far off by the shining sea, "rounding it off with the infinite?" Have we not felt it sometimes as we have stood and looked at some sunset, when the glowing colors have spread across the heavens, and night itself seemed charmed, and lingered, loath to spoil such

beauty? At such a time how coarse things have been forgotten, and the vain and frivolous sank abashed, as if we looked into the celestial city where there entereth nothing that "defileth or maketh a lie;" and all within us has felt that there was the emblem, the ideal of that for which it longed.

Or again, have we not had this consciousness more definite and vivid when amidst the blind selfishness of men there has risen before us some true bit of nobility, some real heroism, some moral beauty? Has not the soul leapt up with an enthusiastic admiration, and felt—There, that is the real life, the true worth of things; that is what one longs to be, and being which would satisfy us?

Or yet better still, can we think of one who, with gentle counsel and wise persuasion, and the power of his own goodness, has turned us from some evil purpose, and led us on, patient and hopeful, until ours has been the victory, and another life has begun for us? I know that human help like this is often weak and marred with faults, and that we are clumsy to use and slow to perceive it. Yet there are times when we say of such a one: "That is the grandest service any man can do for his fellow. I owe him more than I can owe to any other. He has helped me nearer to the life I want to live."

Think of these three illustrations again. We may find an indication of the threefold way in which God satisfies us with his goodness—by

the *ideal* of goodness, by the *life* of goodness, by the *possession* of goodness.

These are the characteristics of the three great dispensations. In the Jewish dispensation there is the satisfying *ideal of goodness*. In the Lord Jesus Christ we have the satisfying *life of goodness*. And completing these two comes the gracious gift of the Holy Ghost, through whom the ideal and the life are made a *possession*, and we are to be "conformed to the image of his Son."

The law of God is the idea of goodness. Its precepts and services bring out and set forth the idea of the truest life that man can live. No thought can go beyond the attainment that is claimed in these words: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.*" But the idea of goodness is at once a satisfaction, and yet it is also the revelation of a great need, the awakening of a great desire. This ideal goodness hung luminous as a star in the eastern sky—very beautiful, but very far off, its brightness and purity seeming only to make earth duller and coarser. It has been well said that the law set up the idea of a holy life, and yet gave no power to realize that ideal. Its sacrifices awakened the necessity of an atonement, and yet could point to no true offering for sin. Its priesthood held forth the necessity of a representative of the sinner before God, and yet it gave no priest

who was able to save to perfection. So the law prophesied of Christ and prepared for his coming.

Then comes the great gift of God, satisfying us with the life of goodness—the Son of God made man. The ideal goodness is made flesh, and dwells amongst us, wearing our common nature and in the midst of our daily circumstances.

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought ;
Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef.”

Now in this very humanity of ours, and shut in by our little sphere, amidst our coarse wants, our poverty and toil and sorrow, amidst doubt and scorn and threats of men and temptations of the devil, that perfect law is lived, and lived perfectly. In Christ Jesus the law of love to God and love to man is fulfilled. Here is One who, from the cradle to the grave, along a way of agonies and loneliness and blackest shame and awful curse, never swerved for one moment from the perfect law—who could look back over all the life and cry: “Father, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to

do." "I have glorified thee"—*glorified*, obedience and love at their fullest are in that word. And for thee, my soul, what love! "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"—so ran the ideal goodness of the Jewish law. But for thee, no neighbor of his verily, but very "far off," "an alien," for thee he who was rich empties himself and takes upon him the form of a slave, and humbles himself to death, even the death of the cross; for very love to thee, my soul, he stopped at no sacrifice; he heeded no peril; he endured all that hell could devise and all that earth could execute against him; for thee a love so vast, so wise, planning the loftiest good with perfect knowledge, and yet fulfilling all with tenderest pity and gentlest care. For such a gift, which angels bend to see, adoring and amazed, what canst thou say! "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name . . . who satisfieth thee with goodness!" In him we see all the ideal of humanity fulfilled. In him the ages find the kindling of an enthusiastic devotion, ever fresh and ever growing. Set him before thee, my soul, dwelling on each feature of his wondrous beauty. Meditate on each separately, and then complete the vision by their union and their harmony. Dwell upon that loftiest dignity; yet never was such perfect lowliness. See his authority over devils and diseases, over winds and waves, over the masses of men and the forces of the world—and yet what an utter self-forgetting, self-ignoring!

Here is holiness unsullied, yet he bends in closest contact with our coarse and sinful humanity. Here is truth unflawed on every side, and yet the tenderest sympathy with his dull scholars, a perfect meekness. Here is an endurance that never faltered, never murmured; and yet here is the pity as of a mother. Here is the strength of the Almighty, and yet a patience that never spake an unkind word to the most blundering and forgetful of his followers. Here is heaven's gentleness and earth's most splendid heroism. Alas! my soul, why does not this vision always haunt thee? How canst thou suffer a thousand trivial things to turn thy gaze so lightly from thy Lord? The broken bits of human heroism have their worshipers; their fame is kept alive in marble and in brass; art and poetry find in them an inspiration. And yet of these what is the best, the fairest, compared with this life of goodness? By the record of heroic deeds men are thrilled, and fired, and uplifted, and girt for endurance and daring. My soul, what ground of splendid hope, what source of strength and courage and all true brotherliness, what an example and inspiration of lofty and noble life hast thou in this unspeakable gift!

But that, glorious as it is, is not all. If that were all it might undo as much as it could do. A life which stirs our wonder and our admiration, but which leaves us in despair. A light that makes our coarse and selfish lives a thousand-

fold more dark, and in sight of which our poor attempts at being better are stricken and withered. To satisfy us with goodness requires more than the ideal, and more than the vision. How, then, shall I be satisfied? There is but one answer: *I shall be satisfied when I awake with his likeness.* Then shall my dreams and desires be filled and fulfilled when that vision of goodness is but the life that I live. That is thy satisfaction, my soul. Speak it to thyself until thou canst take in something of its unspeakable glory. This, and nothing less than this, is to be thy satisfaction—**TO BE LIKE HIM.** This completes and crowns the purposes of his grace. For this great work the Holy Ghost is given—that we may be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts—reigning there, controlling and subduing us, teaching and enlightening us, that we may have the mind that was also in him. And this not a faint and far-off possibility, but as the good which lies in all the common things of every day, and all along the common byways of our life, in the house, in the business, everywhere—“all things work together for good to them that love God”—for this good, the soul’s uttermost satisfaction—that *we be conformed to the image of his Son.*

Let us try to bring the glorious truth within the compass of our desire and expectation. For this,

my soul, thou art forgiven; for this thou art healed; for this thou art redeemed; for this God has crowned thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies—that he may satisfy thee with goodness. Ask thyself, and seek earnestly to get some answer to the question—How can I ever come to have this satisfaction as my own—I, foul, sinful, careless as I am—scarcely with any longing after goodness, and then so lightly turned aside eager for a thousand trifles empty as the air? Can blessedness like this be mine?

Think, then—if there should come to thee one who knows thee through and through—all the past, every secret thought and wish standing out in hideous nakedness before him, and who yet loves thee, loves thee through and through, loves thee with a love that endured all shame and suffering for thy sake; surely such true love were earth's best treasure. Think—if he should be able to loose thee from that past, if knowing all thy frailty and folly he yet could help thee, and help thee perfectly; if amidst thy low and selfish thoughts he could bring his truth, so that it should reign with thee more and more; if he could bring into thy impatience and hatred his own love and gentleness; if he could gird thee with courage, and gladden thee with hope, and fill thee with faith—should not that go far to complete thy satisfaction? Think again—if he should know thee with all thy hidden faculties and powers, all that thou canst ever come to be, and

he should say unto thee: "Soul, I can develop, I can uplift, I can transform until the life of perfect goodness is thine." What then?

He is come—AS MANY AS RECEIVED HIM, TO THEM GAVE HE POWER TO BECOME THE SONS OF GOD. Stay not discussing limits of goodness and definitions of perfection. Leave that to him. Be thou, my soul, all eager to have all that thy Lord waits to give thee. Look up to him now as thine own. Receive him into thine heart, able and willing to do as much for thee as for any. Surrender thyself wholly to him for the fulfillment of these great purposes, his satisfaction as well as thine. And claiming and expecting from such a Savior such fullness of blessing, let thy song already celebrate his mercy—"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name . . . who satisfieth thee with goodness."

Satisfaction—I think I have seen it upon earth, where the little child lies in the mother's arms all compassed with love—love that folded in the arms, that consecrated all the life to the little one; love that looked from yearning eyes, and that sang in songs which soothed and gladdened it, whilst it lay laughing with a perfect gladness; without regret or fear, without care or want, all untouched by anything that could break the sunny surface of that perfect peace. See in this the fair emblem of what God's love can do for us. He thine, my soul, thine own, and thou altogether his; so com-

passed about with favor that thou canst lie down within the Everlasting Arms, the past hushed forever, and about thee the sunshine of his presence; so sure, so safe within his love, that thou canst but rest. Where Omnipotence watches there is no room for fear; where goodness like his controls all things thou canst not wish for other than his will. And on forever this purpose goes shaping all the ages—that thou be more and more like unto thy Lord, the fairest and altogether lovely. Sing aloud for very gladness—Bless the Lord, O my soul!

III. THIS SATISFACTION IS THE RENEWAL OF OUR YOUTH.

Earth has not within it a sadder sight than an old age which has found nothing beyond the present and the seen. Old age, in all its emptiness and want, is a thousand-fold more to be pitied than the helplessness of infancy—when hope has died, and there is nothing left to live for, except that the mystery of death makes it almost worse to die; when all that were loved are lost; when faith alike in men and things is withered and dead; when all that remains is a past full of regret and a future full of fear, and a present that is ever darkened by the chill shadow of death. So the old man sits while the sun goes down behind the cold, gray clouds, and the mists wind about the hills. All is without warmth, without color, without hope.

And up beside it there come memories of sunny youth, when rosy hope made all the future bright; when strength made life a joy; when love was fresh and found a charm in everything. Now all is gone, except this dreary loneliness. O blessed is it, most blessed, when the soul has found in God the springs of a perpetual youth; when love and hope and joy have found an abiding satisfaction, fresh and forever unfolding new stores of blessedness! Earth has no lovelier scene than such an old age, when, as sometimes in the far North, without the barrier of black night, the sunset meets and melts into the dawning day, and the purple splendor of the eventide is lost in the golden glory of the rising sun. The crowning blessedness of life is that, when with hope full and triumphant, with faith restful in its might, with love looking and longing for his appearing, the soul hears his voice—and then, calm and strong as on the wings of an eagle, it soars upward and home to everlasting rest.

Delight thyself in the Lord. Make him thy fairest, thy chiefest, thy dearest, thy hope and thy home; so shalt thou learn to sing this sweetest note of praise—BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND ALL THAT IS WITHIN ME, BLESS HIS HOLY NAME . . . WHO SATISFIETH THEE WITH GOODNESS.

VIII.

“The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.”—PSAL. CIII, 6, 7.

HERE begins the second part of this Psalm. The first five verses tell of personal mercies. The sixth and seventh tell of God's goodness to others. One almost looks for the familiar *selah* here—as if there came that which hushed his singing, and amidst his own blessedness David begins to think of those who are not as he is. Whilst he triumphs thus they are troubled, burdened, wronged. Whilst he is crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercy, he sees the hungry, the outcast, the down-trodden. *All the oppressed!* Ah, what a multitude that no man can number! A sight that might well silence the music of our song. But for these there is help: there is deliverance. And even for these he can take up the strains of his thanksgiving.

All the oppressed.—Let the procession pass before us, the troops of men and women and little children; white faces, hollow cheeks, wasted limbs, the ghostlike forms with hands that hang down helplessly, crushed by grief until they have ceased

to complain, and prayer itself seems of no avail! So they go, the thousands dumb with very despair. And then another host whose wrongs have maddened them, with eyes that glare, and voices that clamor, and hands that are lifted up to heaven, half in entreaty and half in fierce upbraiding. The oppressed nations; the men whose poverty makes them the prey of the designing; those who have been thrust into outer darkness by others' fault; the bitter cry of the thousands and tens of thousands of wronged women gone down past all pity, almost past all help,—let all this come before us. And most of all the hosts of children, poor little children whose lives have no ray of hope, no touch or whisper of love; children whose very coming is a curse and a burden, whose life is a waking up to want and misery and sin; inheriting passions that make the struggle almost a hopeless one. Think of all this, about us, in the midst of us, surging and moaning like a winter's sea. Every man has some side on which he is most exposed to temptation and doubt: ah, to how many of us these are the things which drive us furthest into bewilderment and evil questioning!

All the oppressed! To pass amidst the brutality of the lowest, and to see all that is revolting and hideous! to hear the story of every drunkard's home! and yet almost worse, amidst the glitter of luxuries and splendor to hear stories of villainy, of betrayal, of heartbreak! *All the oppressed.* As

we look out upon it we begin to wonder—"O God! is there anywhere right and truth enthroned and almighty? Is it all darkness and confusion? Is might the only right, and gain the only good, and self-indulgence the only end of life?" Thank God, the darkness and earthquake and fire and storm do pass by, and with rapt face and eager soul we listen for the still small Voice! Fear not; it is all right. God is watching and waiting. THE LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small." Things are not a lawless hubbub, a blind confusion. "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King forever." And out of this confidence the song comes again—like a river blocked and broken by defiant bowlders, torn into a thousand hidden threads and silenced for a while, then flowing forth once more in fullness, with strength and singing: "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name; extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name, I AM, and rejoice before him. A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation."

It will help us to learn this song if our thought includes the two verses: *He executeth righteousness and judgment for all the oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.* David passes on to think of the great national deliverance of his people from the hand

of the oppressor. Reading thus the one verse by the light of the other may suggest some reasons why oppression is permitted, and how God delivers the oppressed.

Think of Israel in the time of Joseph, multiplying and prospering. They dwelt in Goshen, and, like their father Abraham, were growing rich in the land of Egypt. They became so many and so prosperous as to be regarded by the political authorities alike with envy and with fear. And, like all prosperous people, they would be having the friendship of those about them, intermarrying **with them**, and daily bound by new relationships. So Egypt was becoming their home, and they wanted no other. What now of their glorious destiny? What now of the promises which God had given to their father Abraham? What now of that future in which this chosen seed was to **bless all the nations of the earth**? They were content with Egypt—why should they go again to Canaan, a land from which their fathers had been driven by famine! They fell in with the idolatry of the land—the God of Abraham belonged **to the land of Canaan**, and they were going to settle here. Now the question comes—How shall these people be separated from Egypt? How shall they be bound together into a brotherhood? How shall they be inspired with one great purpose, a purpose strong enough to lead them up from Egypt into a land of which they knew little, ex-

cept that it was exposed to famine, and peopled with fierce tribes who would certainly oppose the coming of a strange nation to take possession of their country?

Then arose *a king that knew not Joseph*. He saw in the growing host of Israel a peril. And he said unto his people: "Come, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us. . . . Therefore they did set over them task-masters to afflict them with their burdens."

Think of the change that followed immediately. At once the Israelites were strangers, sharply marked off from the people of Egypt. The friends of their prosperity knew them no more. They have none to help them, plundered and oppressed on every side. So they are driven together by this common sorrow: the fiery affliction consumed all other differences, and the blows of the task-master welded them into a unity such as they had never known before, and such as could scarcely have been produced in any other way. And now, with their lives thus embittered in this land of bondage, they begin to think again of Abraham, and of the inheritance promised to his seed. Had they not a right to go up and claim that goodly land as their own? So this oppression knit and bound them into a further unity by this common sorrow and the common promise.

Again, *Here is oppression further overruled by God.*—There is wanted a leader of the people, a man brave, great-souled, afraid of nothing. But such a leader of men can scarcely be trained amongst these slaves, beaten, spirit-broken, their lives well-nigh crushed out of them, with fear of Pharaoh and his taskmasters forever haunting them. There is wanted a man—*one of them*, who can claim to be their representative, and yet a man who can speak the message of God to this Pharaoh without a touch of dread—a man unawed by the power of kings and undazzled by the glitter of courts. How can such a one be found amongst these Israelites? This very oppression shall be the means of training the man for the work. The cruel law that bade all the sons to be killed, was the very means that led to the rescue of Moses, and to his adoption in the house of Pharaoh. Thus was secured for him his training in all the skill of the Egyptians, and the skill and authority that made him so perfect a leader of Israel.

See again, *How the very oppression revealed the power of God for their deliverance!*

It was needful that the people, tainted as they were by the idolatry of Egypt, should have wrought into them, through and through them, the greatness and the glory of the Lord. The greater the might and defiance of the oppressors, the greater the helplessness and bondage of the oppressed, so much more room and opportunity was there for

the display of the power of Israel's God. One by one came those miracles, with brief interval and increasing power, plaguing the Egyptians and smiting at their pride, turning their very gods into forces that fought for Israel; here for all time was such a manifestation of the Lord their God as no people had ever seen before. With such a helper these very slaves began to lift up their heads as if they felt their redemption drew nigh. Faith sprang up again, and hope, and they began to catch the defiant confidence of their leader, and triumphed in their assurance: *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.*

Again, *Israel learned how God executes judgment on the oppressor.*

The firstborn is smitten in every house. Then all Egypt, terror-stricken, rises up and clamors that this people go; if they delay the whole land will perish. So Israel marched out of the land in haste. Then the pride of this Pharaoh seizes him again. Shall he let the people go thus?—a people who had not a sword or spear amongst them—these that had been his slaves, should they go forth so defiantly? Was Egypt, which had already endured such grievous insults for their sake, to be triumphed over thus? Maddened with rage, he summoned his chariots and horsemen, and cried: "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil." Forth he sped with his host until he came in sight of Israel,

and rushed eagerly after them into the sandy bed of the sea. And there God, the God of Israel, shot out his lightnings, whilst his thunders shook the ground. Terror and confusion seized his troops. With the host panic-stricken, the leaders irresolute, the frightened horses plunging and the chariots sinking heavily, in vain Pharaoh sought to urge his way. And then as Israel ranged themselves along the farther shore they saw the waters loosed, sweeping down from their heights in awful triumph, hurling to heaven the showers of spray—and lo, the armies of Egypt were seen no more. *Thou didst blow with thy breath, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.* So the Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

All that are oppressed. Do not let us think that the scale of such national oppression is one which we can not apply to the individual. If we had been amongst the Israelites in those dark days, should we not have been as much troubled and fretted and bewildered by those evils as we are by the thought of the oppressions of to-day? “O God!” we should have cried, “why this dreadful bondage—this cruel slavery? Hast thou forgotten thy people, thy servant Abraham, and the promised inheritance?” At the sound of that taskmaster’s whip what black and dreadful thoughts would have filled our souls! “Is there a God in heaven? One who is gracious and compassionate?”

Surely he would come forth to smite these cruel oppressors!" But now we look back and see a purpose in its permission; we see it working out a hidden good. And so let us trust still and wait, knowing that delay is not forgetfulness. The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

And do not let us think that deliverance wrought for a nation has no comfort for the lonely and scattered sufferers; that they must go uncared for, unpitied, unhelped. *For all that are oppressed.* It is a consolation, a strength, a triumph; well may we put it in the foremost place of the chiefest mercies for which we praise God. There is not in all our round world one that is unloved, not one uncared for. How sweet a note is that which tells of his kingdom! Other monarchs exult in the vastness of their dominion, in the wealth and splendor of their state, in the number and valor of their forces, in the greatness and prosperity of their cities. But the King of kings exulteth in his *righteousness*. Listen to the music which heralds his coming: "He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." Thank God, up from our poor world, with its mystery of sorrow and suffering, we can look unto the

Most High. He is our refuge and strength. He seeth the oppressed, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground. He pitieth them, who is full of compassion. He is righteous, and the fire of his indignation is kindled at the sight of oppression. Sterner words never leapt from human lips than those of our gracious Savior: *It were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.* Offend! What then of him that *oppresseth* one of his little ones?

And not righteousness and judgment only is it that waits for the oppressed. More, much more than David knew in his loftiest flight and clearest vision, since the Son of God is come as the brother of all men. "*He was oppressed. He was afflicted.*" As the little Child, he was plotted against, and men came forth to murder him. Away in the bleak darkness, beaten upon by fierce storms, screened at the bosom of a homeless mother, who fled for refuge with her little babe into a strange land—such was the child Jesus; and now for evermore there is no little oppressed child in all the world but he who was the poor Babe of Bethlehem cometh in tenderest pity as Friend and Helper. Every oppression that ever came upon any came upon him—the gnawing of fierce hunger; the weary wandering, who had not where to lay his head; the Church condemned him as a heretic, and the State sentenced him to death as a traitor; "neither

did his brethren believe in him." Betrayed, denied, forsaken, *he was oppressed* by all the burden of that awful death which hung over him; oppressed by all malice and insult of his foes; by all pain of body and anguish of mind; by the crushing load of spiritual loneliness. "Reproach hath broken my heart." And now he who is the King of kings and Lord of lords is Brother and Friend of all that are oppressed. Blessed be God!

It is much, very much, that in this poor world of ours, with all its wrong and confusion, the grinding tyrannies, the money-worship, the heartlessness and selfishness—that the mightiest in our midst is not amongst the richest, not amongst the high and the great is he; in all the world the mightiest is he who is most wronged. God himself, the Almighty, comes down and stands at that man's back.

Ah, how terrible shall be that great day of the Lord when he shall sit upon the throne of his judgment, and the books shall be opened! the cash-book, the ledger, the wages-book! How shall the accounts balance when God comes to count up the profit and loss? How dreadful, and yet how little thought of, are those words of the Apostle James, and how needful too, amidst the miseries of the underfed and overworked, the grinding of flesh and blood to make men's fortunes faster:

"GO TO, NOW, YE RICH MEN, WEEP AND HOWL FOR YOUR MISERIES THAT SHALL COME UPON YOU.

YOUR RICHES ARE CORRUPTED, AND YOUR GARMENTS ARE MOTH-EATEN. YOUR GOLD AND SILVER IS CANKERED; AND THE RUST OF THEM SHALL BE A WITNESS AGAINST YOU, AND SHALL EAT YOUR FLESH AS IT WERE FIRE. YE HAVE HEAPED TREASURE TOGETHER FOR THE LAST DAYS. BEHOLD, THE HIRE OF THE LABORERS . . . WHICH IS OF YOU KEPT BACK BY FRAUD, CRIETH: AND THE CRIES OF THEM WHICH HAVE REAPED ARE ENTERED INTO THE EARS OF THE LORD OF SABAOth.”

God is watching. He keepeth his account. Men may think the widow hath none to plead for her; that the orphan hath no helper; that the poor man hath no defense against a mean advantage. God watcheth; his righteousness is kindled into a fire of indignation, and some day he shall come and summon the oppressor and the unjust into his presence. These cases he takes up and makes his own. Of these things too shall it be spoken: “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto ME.” Then shall the verdict go against the oppressor, and he shall be cast in heavy damages. *It is true:* The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all—*all* that are oppressed. Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the Judge standeth before the door!

IX.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”—PSALM CIII, 8.

THIS is the next great division in the Psalm. David begins by praising God for personal mercies. Then he praises him for great national deliverances. Now comes yet a higher note and richer, the highest possible. The Lord God himself becomes the subject of his song. David soars as he sings until he is lost in the light of the glory of God. It is well when this is the order of our praise; when, like the lark, we start from the earth, from the midst of the little circle of our benefits, and as we rise the vision spreads on every side; a thousand other blessings come into sight, and rising still and singing, heaven grows more and more, until all else is forgotten.

1. LET US THINK OF GOD HIMSELF BECOMING OUR SONG.

This is the fullness and perfection of knowing God—so to know him that he himself becomes our delight; so to know him that praise is sweet-

est and fullest and freshest and gladdest when we sing of him. He who has learned this blessed secret carries the golden key of heaven—nay, he hath fetched heaven down to earth, and need not envy the angels now.

This part of the song is a solo—not as in a chorus where many parts and instruments make up the whole. He who hath this blessedness hath it complete in himself. And more than that, it is ever an *original* song. Others may teach us of God's being and of his character, but this music is ours only when we know him for ourselves as none can make him known. All eyes see God's benefits, but few see God. I can learn from without about a great First Cause, the Creator of all things, but such a one does not touch me—is not *mine*: I can not delight myself in a logical deduction. I may get a little further, and have a religion that may be called "*grace before and after meat.*" It asks a blessing, it returns thanks—and nothing more. "For what we are about to receive," begins it; "For what we have received," ends it all. It seeks God because of its want; it sees in God only a source of supply. But David soars far away beyond all this when he makes the Lord his song. This joy comes only from knowing God by closest and abiding communion. It is a heart matter. "He that *loveth* not, *knoweth* not God; for God is love." *Love* is eyes and ears and heart by which to learn of God. Blessed are the pure in heart:

for they shall see God—see him now, here, everywhere, in everything. We are to grow in grace that we may grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The landscape stretches before me, but what it is to me depends upon my eyes and power of vision. It may be flooded with sunshine, and yet I may be conscious only of black night. It may be sharp and clear, and yet I may look out only on bewildering mist. Or again, what the landscape is to me depends upon my character and disposition. To one man its stillness is a delicious charm, another turns from it as dreariness itself, and yet another sees it only as a matter of crops and pasturage, and another looks with envious eyes that make it but a source of misery. So is our perception of God dependent upon our moral and spiritual nature. And in all the world he is *the* blessed man who looks, and lo! God meets him; no sight, no sound but it reveals that presence ever in some gracious form; no place but surely God is there, and it becomes the very gate of heaven. God is his delight and his song, and what God is fills his soul with sweetest music.

There is much in this for us to meditate upon. It means that there is in us that which is akin to the nature of God, since God himself is that which we are able to desire, and to seek and to delight in. It means, too, that our knowledge of God is not one branch of our education, one sub-

ject of our study, but our knowledge of God is really a summing up of the whole life—our contact with the commonest things of earth, with other people, the very spirit and tendency of every day's life—these shape and decide our knowledge of God. If I in my daily life am patient and forbearing and tender-hearted, I shall see these things more clearly and fully in my Father in heaven. If I set myself through and through me to please God, I shall not go far without finding his smile, and beginning to delight myself in him. Truth, love, pity, self-sacrifice—these are the steps of his throne up which we pass to see him face to face. And herein lies the dreadful punishment of sin—it puts out the eyes by which men should see God. To such he is but a thought—he who alone is the abiding reality. To such he is not a vision, but a blackness and burden of fear. And this is virtue's prize. Do you wonder that goodness goes unpaid, unrecognized, unhonored? No, it does not. Here is its honor and exceeding great reward—in its vision of God.

We guard our eyes as the light of life; the inlet of its glory and blessedness. My soul, guard a thousand times more eagerly within thee love and truth and reverence and purity, for these are the eyes by which thou seest God. Does the soul ask sadly,—How may these be ours—love, truth, purity, and reverence? These are the fruits of the Spirit, who comes to impart them to each one of us, shed-

ding the love of God abroad in our hearts that we may look up and see him, crying, "Abba, Father!"

My soul, of all men great or wise or famous, do thou long most of all to be like unto him who has come to see in God a gracious and pitiful Father, infinitely tender, ordering all things in perfect wisdom and love, and seeking by all things to lead us up to the highest life, himself the satisfying vision of beauty, stooping to carry the sins and sorrows of the world. Out of that vision is born the gladness which makes the Lord its song.

To be able thus to sing about God is not only the truest knowledge of him—more than that, *it is the most real possession of him as our own*. The Lord must be mine, assuredly mine, before he becomes my song. The Lord is *my* strength, and then *my* song. The sweet music of the twenty-third Psalm, as indeed of all the Psalms, begins with this conscious and assured possession: *The Lord is MY Shepherd*,—that is the starting-point and source of all its joy. *I will say of the Lord, he is my Refuge and my Fortress: my God*—then the heart kindles into all the glowing rapture that follows. The vision of God must pass into a possession. This verse seems to have a direct reference to such a vision and possession. *He made known his ways unto Moses*, and proclaimed himself the Lord, merciful and gracious. Away on the still height of the mountain, whence the very cattle had

been driven from feeding, and on which no foot was to fall save his own, Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock, shadowed from the blinding glory of the Divine Presence by the gracious hand of God himself. And Jehovah passed by and proclaimed himself: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." And as the vision of goodness passed before him, Moses made haste, and ran, and fell down and worshiped; and he put himself, and that which was dearer to him than himself, right into the keeping of this gracious Lord. "O Lord, let *my* Lord, I pray thee, go among us; . . . and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance." Then does the vision of God become our song when we see him so as to have him our own, our very own—fully, perfectly, assuredly our own God.

This is the high privilege which may be ours, as this is the only blessedness which can satisfy us. We want more than doctrines, creeds, systems of theology. The soul thirsteth for God, for the living God—for him who is all the variety of character, and in the different conditions of life, in all conflict and weakness and care as well as in our strength and gladness, can so reveal himself and so fit into us that each may come to say: "My God; my own God." So patient and so gentle with the dull and slow; for the sad and burdened, a Presence tenderly comforting and de-

livering us; for the careworn a Rest, for the fearful a brightness of Hope—a blessed “Fear not” abiding with us; a glorious King and Conqueror for those who are torn by the strife of wills. For the young and glad and strong himself the Fairest and Altogether Lovely, the brave Captain of our salvation, able to kindle and to sustain all the love and enthusiasm of our nature. Understanding the peculiar ones who are unlike other people—who, like Thomas, stumble on in blindness, finding no light, while others have their eyes opened—stooping to let the bewildered disciple put his finger in the nail-prints and thrust his hand into the side—so that these, too, shall come to cry, “My Lord, and my God!”

Thus is it that heaven’s sweetest music is born upon the earth—in this vision and possession of God. He, so great, so glorious! and I, so all unworthy, that I should call him *mine*! What can we say—what can we do? Wondering at love like this, compassed about with such blessing, dwelling in such assured safety with such boundless hope before us, the soul’s music can but flow forth in ceaseless praise. For what thou art, O Lord—for what thou art to me, I bless and praise thy name!

And this delight in God comes to spread itself over the whole round of our religious life. Then is prayer most perfect when it leads us beyond the outer courts of petition into the very banqueting chamber of communion with our God. Then is

praise freest of earth and fullest of heaven when we get beyond the gifts, and find in the Giver the strength and sweetness of our song. Of all men, he is at once the happiest and best whose delight is most of all in his God, to whom there is nothing in earth or heaven to be compared with the Lord. Dull seasons come, but the soul only turns to find in God a greater contrast and the room for more delight in him. Life's uncertainties give us a new hold upon the Everlasting. The things which are black and cruel mysteries on this side of the clouds lose their weight and pressure as we soar into his presence and rest in his love and wisdom. Our very fears sweep us within the blest refuge of his keeping, even as the bird wings its way upon the blasts of the storm into the clefts of the rock. Happy, thrice happy, is he who has learned to make God his song!

II. LET US DWELL UPON THE MERCY OF OUR GOD.

This note may well be first: "He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great mercy." We have not learnt to sing at all until we have learnt to sing of his mercy; and the more we learn of all else, still the greater is the mercy which we have to celebrate.

I went forth amongst men and heard them lightly excusing evil, saying one to another: "Every man has his weakness; every one his fail-

ing." The tone was of pity only, not of indignation, as if sin were a misfortune rather than a crime. So I came from their midst thinking within myself: Here mercy can find no place, for here there is no sin. Then I entered within my room and kneeled in prayer. And before me came the vision of One who sat upon his throne, "the King of kings and Lord of lords." And he looked on men with pure eyes that saw them through and through, their words and ways, their inner thoughts and tendencies and wishes. And in that pure white light, lo! all was stained—evil, evil only, evil continually, evil down to the very springs and beginnings of the life—the whole imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually. Before that all-righteous Judge the past gave up its dead and every moment lived again, and all that had been spoken and all that had been done stood out in his presence. That searching light shone underneath the words and ways, and laid bare the evil that shame had covered, the thought that hid itself, the desires that crept within the heart. Before him appeared not only all that had been, but all that would have been if will and power had wrought together, the ill that failed for lack of opportunity. Then I turned away in great fear, and said within myself: Here also is no room for mercy; the offenses are ingrained and of the very heart; they are so black and numberless. Then came that righteous Judge and stood over me and spake

all tenderly: "*Come now, and let us reason together; . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" And lo! he himself came forth to bear our sins in his own body on the tree. *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.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name. . . . The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

X.

“He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.”—PSA. CIII, 9.

WE may perhaps wonder to find so unpleasant a topic in so joyous a Psalm. Yet as we dwell upon it, I think we shall see that not only the fewness of the chidings, but those chidings themselves in their origin and purpose, are matters worthy to be put in the forefront of our mercies.

It may be well at the outset to notice some common mistakes as to this chiding. There is one word in the Scriptures which is constantly associated with it; that word is Father. See how at once David goes on to utter the thought which the mention of chiding seems to suggest: *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* It is the chiding of the Father, and the chiding is because we are children. Let us take fast hold of that. It is not the chastening of a judge. It is not the chastening of the master. The judge has only to concern himself with the law and to act accordingly. The master thinks of his own authority and commandment. But the Father loses himself in the thought of the

child. Right through such chiding, in every touch and tone of it, is the great Fatherly love that knows the child and is eager for its welfare, and that seeks by this very chiding to further its own great and gracious purposes concerning the child. It is out of this Fatherly relationship that the chiding springs.

Nothing can be more clear and constant, nothing can be more emphatic, than the way in which the Scriptures speak of us as redeemed by the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the curse of the law. We can add nothing to that full and perfect satisfaction. Now are we who believe brought into the household of God our Father, and he seeks in all the daily life to educate and discipline and develop us as his children. Now has our Father an interest in us, a concern about us, such as will not suffer him to pass lightly over that which he disapproves. Though the sword of justice be sheathed, the Father holds the rod of parental authority. Whatever the chiding may be, it comes from this tender relationship—from the love of our Father God.

Is there not a horribly false notion about this matter amongst some people? Are there not some poor, frightened children of God whose language about these chidings savors of the foul libel of the father of lies? They talk about "trials" as if God sent these things *to see how much we can bear!* It is not a definite belief, but it is a kind of

side-thought that peeps in at the window and mutters at the door, and that frightens timid souls quite as much as a definite belief—that God sends them losses and sorrows and troubles to see how much they can bear. That wretched and false notion would never have come if we had kept the thought of the Father before us. Think of a mother who should take her little one and set it on some ledge of rock, a giddy height above the tumbling seas, where, if it should fear, it would be dashed to pieces—that she might see how much courage it had! Impossible—the very thought of it is an outrage upon every instinct of our nature. Whatever the chiding may be—blessed be God!—love, infinite love, is at the source of it, and the end of it, and right through it all.

Again, *there are many who live chiding themselves when God does not chide them.*—A strong, abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior would mean sunshine to many who live in gloom, paradise to those who are dwellers in the tombs. These troubled and restless souls are not content to leave the condemnation of the law where God has put it, but they are always going back to borrow old burdens with which they ought to have done for ever and ever. If I have come to God by way of the Cross I am accepted in the Beloved. *There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.* The holy and faithful God has said concerning my sins that they shall be re-

membered against me no more forever. He says of them that they are "cast behind his back;" "cast into the depth of the sea;" removed "as far as the east is from the west." And now our way is from the cross onward and upward. But these sorrowful souls go back from the cross to dig up their sins once more and to weep over them. They even come to think that the only way of access to the Father is to keep on telling him of the sins that he has forgiven, and the only way to please him is to call themselves all kinds of dreadful names. They live as if religion lay in shouldering again the burdens which God has taken away. They groan when they pray, and they sigh when they sing. By all means let us keep a most lowly sense of our own unworthiness, and a most gracious sense of God's forgiveness; but if Christ is ours, then our place is to be living a life of peace and joy in his love. If my sins are laid upon him who hath borne them away, why should I go seeking that dreadful load and come staggering under its burden into the presence of God? If God has buried my sins, there let them lie, in that sepulcher with a great stone upon the mouth of it which none can roll away, sealed with God's own seal whereon is graven a cross encircled with the blessed words: *Thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Yet again, others chide themselves when God does not chide them, *through want of faith in his providence.*—Every sorrow and every depression

and every loss is taken as a reproof and chastening. This is to wrong God grievously; and it is greatly to injure ourselves. Our children would not learn much if they thought of every lesson as a punishment, that the school was a prison, and that learning was only a penalty to be endured, and not a blessed opportunity of fitness for manhood and the larger life that waits for them further on. This is exactly what some of God's children are always doing. They mistake tasks for punishments, and think they are for nothing else but to be cried over. Now come, timid soul, it will do thee good to look into this matter aright. When God bids us go up into another class and learn a new set of lessons, it is not the same thing as if we were "turned" and punished. Do not begin to think, "Whatever can I have done that God has given me this hard lesson to learn?" Rather accept it joyfully as something more which he has to teach thee. Although our loving Father never would and never could send trials upon us to see how much we can bear, yet he does send losses and sorrows and difficulties to develop and to discipline us. God tries us *to prove us to ourselves*, and to *prove himself to us*. He puts us in possession of ourselves by new circumstances and new difficulties, and he puts us in possession of himself. These things teach us our wants; and they teach us his power and grace. As in the tale of history when the English king went forth to fight, and sat on a height overlooking

the scene of the battle with the reserve forces about him. In the forefront of the battle he had set his son. And as the day wore on the prince sent a message for help, saying that he was hard pressed in the fight. But the king, seeing from his vantage-ground that all went well, refused. "Let the boy win his spurs," said the king; "for I wish, if so God orders it, that the day may be his." So, in the stress of the conflict, when it seems hard to hold our own, the Heavenly Father sitteth and watcheth that all is well, ever with a great store of help available: and if he send not that which we ask, yet is it not because he careth not for us, but that ours may be the greater victory and the braver fight.

It is never safe to interpret God's love to us by our circumstances. We can not measure how much God loves us by our income. We should not like our children to measure our love to them by treats and sweetmeats and holidays. We know that it is in our care for their learning, in the anxious thought and provision for their training, that we show our love. Neither for ourselves nor for others can we read God's love or his chidings in our circumstances. Lot lost all; but so did Job; Abraham was very rich; but so was Dives; Lazarus was a beggar; St. Paul was often in famine and in prison; and the Well Beloved himself had not where to lay his head.

How, then, does God chide us? Well, it may

seem strange and contradictory to say so, but it is true: *We need live near to God to know his chidings.* Living near to him is certainly the best way to escape his chidings altogether; yet this also is true—those who are afar off, who do not dwell in the secret place of the Most High, as they do not know the sweetest, tenderest tokens of his love, so also they can not note the withdrawals of his favor. It is only they that see him face to face, and walk in the light, who are conscious of the little clouds that come between us and the sunshine of his countenance. God's comforts and dainties can only be missed by those who have enjoyed them. God never strikes when it is enough for him to threaten; and never threatens when it is enough for him to look. They know the chidings best who are near enough for him to deal most gently with them—chidings that are a revelation of such patience and tenderness, the appeal of such love, that our hearts are smitten, like Peter's of old, by the *look* of the Lord. Those who are afar off are not conscious of these tokens of his grief, and so are they in danger of going on with little failings unreprieved until they grow into great sources of mischief; and then, in place of grieved look and whispered word, God must come with a rod, if not indeed with the sword, because we are too deaf to hear, too dull to understand, the limits of his displeasure.

He chides us by his Word.—Listen to it as the voice of God. It is salt, which is health-giving; yet is it quick to find out the wounds and set them smarting. The Word is the candle of the Lord with which he comes to search the soul that he may reveal us unto ourselves. They who neglect God's Word do not only bring upon themselves his condemnation, but they are deaf to the voice that condemns them. They go on in their trespass, never heeding him who bids them stop.

Then he chides us by the withdrawing of his Spirit.—One by one the spiritual faculties are smitten—eye and ear lose their power, the hand of faith is paralyzed. Prayer becomes a flat formality, a kind of muttered charm, not a living communion with God. We are refused an audience with the King, we who used to pass into the banqueting chamber and sit under the banner of his love. The means of grace lose their delight. Instead of the music of the Savior's name and the sweetness of his love, we must have some human sensation, some intellectual feast, some display of eloquence, whilst we sit cold and critical, with the soul starved and forgotten. The work of the Lord is a vexation and a burden—there is no unction from the Holy One, the dew of God's blessing is not upon it. And as the presence and favor of God sink into mere memories, so sin and self-indulgence become easier and more lightly excused. And within that hot, parched soul now and then the thunder gathers,

and God's forked lightnings shoot, and through the night the storm rages; but on the morrow all is parched and blighted as before. These are God's chidings, this fearful loss of life's triumph and rest and graciousness. For there comes to such a man a misery that vents its vexation upon everything and everybody (except indeed the one source of it all)—upon the Church, the minister, the people, the family. Earth has scarcely a sadder sight than to see a man who has tasted enough of the goodness of the Lord to spoil him for the world, and yet God is gone. A man with whom God once dwelt; but now he is left in dreary loneliness, and vainly tries to find some power to fill the vacant throne of his heart. Soul, if this case is thine, do not put it away from thee. Thank God that he chideth, that he chideth so long, so patiently, ever longing that thou wouldest come back to him with the entreaty: "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." *He will not always chide.* It is a warning—a terrible penalty on one side of it, as it is a great mercy on the other side. There may be an end of the digging and dressing and pruning; and then comes the doom: *Cut it down.* How long God chides depends upon us. The moment we give in to him, he gives in to us.

He will not always chide.—Pleasant is the other version of it—*he will not be always chiding.*

Our gracious Father is not *always looking for the faults and failings*. The love that is quick to be grieved by our neglect, is the love that is quick to be gladdened when we set ourselves to please him; and ever is it a thousand-fold more ready to see the good than the bad. Pity pleads tenderly amidst our frailty and forgetfulness; but love leaps forth without let or hindrance when we do that which is acceptable in his sight. They do grievously mistake and wrong our God who make the only relationship between the soul and himself one of sin and forgiveness. With very many this is the whole meaning of religion, its beginning and end. On their part it is a matter only of confessing sin, and on God's part it is a continual watching to condemn. *God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* The gospel is the *declaration of God's righteousness* for the remission of sins, that now we may come into his family and know all the blessedness of the children of God. Do not be afraid to step out boldly into the great ocean and atmosphere of his love. Why do we think so readily of his condemning and never of his praising us? His love is more quick with praise than with reproof. We all come to God with confession of sin. Why do so few of us come with the story of victory and triumph?

I will be glad in the Lord means that I can tell him of all the bright and happy things of my

life—of the victories and successes. It is the sweetest and supremest triumph of love that it can govern by praising us when we do well, much more skillfully than can they who only scold us when we go wrong; so that the praise withheld comes to hurt us more than the severest censure. What kind of a father is he to whom the lad comes creeping home from school with downcast face and finger on his lip, and begins in troubled tones: "Father, I am afraid I have not done well to-day. I am afraid I have not been so attentive as I should have been." "Have you done wrong, then?" "No, father; only I thought it was the proper thing to say."

Thank God, I know another lad than that, who comes bounding home from the school and into the father's presence. "Father, I *did* do well in grammar to-day," he cries, triumphantly. "That is right, my lad. And how about the geography?" Then the face and the tone are different: "I did n't do so well in that." Then I think that father, if he be wise, will pat the little lad kindly on the shoulder. "I am glad you did so well in grammar; and if you work hard at geography you will do well in that too." O soul, thy Father in heaven loves to hear thee tell of thy successes!

He will not always chide.—Continued scoldings do but utterly dishearten. What is more miserable or more hopeless than when the servants or the children come to think that it is impossible

for them to please us, and so give up trying? If our God chide us, he doth it wisely, so as not utterly to discourage and not to make us dull and stupid. But he will not be *always* chiding. He hath a joy in our well-doing, and his love shall surely find a way of letting us know it. He doth not wait until we get to heaven before he saith: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Now and here may that word be fulfilled: *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.* Now and here we are lifted up and crowned. There is no bit of true service, no simple token of true love, no kindly deed of self-denial, no brave and resolute endurance, but our gracious Father shall in some way give some word, some smile, some blessed token of his good pleasure. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

XI.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”—PSAL. CIII, 10-12.

LET us be careful to keep these verses in their right place. This is part of the third great subject of praise—*what God is in himself*. It is possible not only to rob this song of its music, but even to turn it into a harsh discord. The stress lies on the first word—HE. “HE hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” The “us” is not to be taken as if in contrast with others. Let us beware of any breath of that spirit which can only magnify its own mercies by magnifying other people’s miseries. The misfortunes of others may well remind us of our own deliverance; but let us be careful of so speaking or thinking as if God could be other than kind and loving to any. The words belong to a series of mercies suggested by the character of God; do not let any use them as if they seem to indicate

that we are special favorites of heaven, and are not to be dealt with as others are. This is the very essence of that Pharisaism against which Christ hurled his fiercest denunciation. The sweep of the song includes all men. *Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. . . . The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*

Let us bestir ourselves to dwell with wondering love upon this theme of thanksgiving. Let the heart be in tune and bring her sweetest music to celebrate the goodness of our God.

Think of the dreadful ending that our sin might have had.

Yet let none begin to conjure up black and hideous visions, the products of foolish men's imaginings; things which do lie against the infinite love of our Father God. We need no background of hellish horrors to set forth God's mercies. His love, like his sun, needs no foil. But let us equally guard against turning lightly away from those awful endings of sin of which the Bible warns us. It is as great an evil to make little of his righteousness as it is to forget his love. Let the words which the Savior has spoken about the ending of sin sink into our hearts—words that gather such an awful force as they come to us from the

midst of miracles of healing and a thousand tokens of gentleness and grace. Sometimes in summer gladness, when the earth lies in luxurious stillness, with beauty and bounty everywhere; when trees are laden with fruit, and fields are golden with harvest, and the flocks lie in rich pasture, and the dark woods stretch away to the purple hills, and the hills stretch up to meet the blue heavens—then have gathered the black clouds, filling all the sky and blotting out the sun, and hushing all with fear, and there has leapt the blaze of lightning, and the thunder crashing everywhere. So do these words of Christ's come amidst the manifestations of his tenderness. Awful as the lightning, dreadful as the thunder, from his lips falls the doom of the impenitent. He, before whom all the future lies open, sees how the ways of sin go sloping down to "a great gulf"—away into an outer darkness, where is "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." He, sitting as the Judge of the whole earth, has spoken the final sentence of sin: "Depart from me, ye cursed." A mystery black and terrible, concerning which we can but quote the words of the Book, yet none the less real because a mystery. Figurative, but none the less true: words that assuredly are not meant needlessly to frighten men; but that are assuredly meant to teach the reality and dreadfulness of sin. Of this be sure, if God have not dealt with us after our sins, it is not because he can in any wise think little of our sins

or lightly pass them by. My sin is linked to death and hell, and only by a mercy infinite and *by terrible things in righteousness* is it that God has loosened and delivered my soul. For this give thanks to God, that it is not with thee as it might have been. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

But there is infinitely more than this—*our sins have not made God cease to love us.*

Think how every sin is an offense against the majesty of the Most High; a lifting up of ourselves with haughty independence, as if we believed the devil's lie: "Ye shall be as gods"—we, God's creatures, dependent upon his bounty for our very bread and breath and all things. We can think of pity pleading for man as so insignificant, so ignorant a thing, whose feebleness and folly were his poor defense. But that God should *love* us still! Grieved, dishonored, distrusted, wronged, yet refusing to leave us! *Herein is love.*

Think again of sin as defiling us, robbing us of the dignity and majesty that came to us with the touch of God's hands when he crowned us with glory and honor. Think of sin as filling mind and heart and soul with all that is loathsome and abhorrent to God. Pity again might stoop to plead that such a creature should be spared; but that love should linger, longing still to bless

and to save, yearning again to enrich and ennoble us, as if he can not forget us, can not leave us, can not give us up. **HEREIN IS LOVE.** And if at last there come a point at which love can do no more, even then love weeps and loves us still. *His mercy endureth*—ah, what slights and insults, what offenses and forgetfulness, what rejections and cruel doubts and delays! His mercy endureth—patient, pleading, entreating, stooping to any humiliation that he may help us; stooping to shame and agony, and to the accursed death of the cross that he may save us—**HIS MERCY ENDURETH FOREVER.** Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Our sins have not made God withhold the TOKENS of his love.

We might have looked for this at least—thinking within ourselves that though love should linger with us, yet, as if eclipsed and darkened by sin, it should surely be a hidden love, seeking thus to alarm and trouble the wanderer,—that though man be not banished from God's presence, yet shall he lose the *tokens* of that Presence. We might have looked that all fair things should wither, and that the very sights and sounds of nature should jar upon the soul that was out of tune and harmony with God. Not for sinners such as we are shall earth yield her flowers and fruits and the sweet breath of things; not for us blue skies and sunset splendors and the stars that make night beautiful. For such the stern fare of

the prisoner is fitter than palace luxuries. But it is not so. Though Paradise be lost to us, God's love bends over us still, and a thousand forms of beauty do greet us on every side. Still the earth is full of his glory.

Or again, we might think—though for his own sake God should spare the fair things of nature, yet as if to mark him off as the source of misery, man shall be to his fellow-man a burden of grief. But far otherwise is it. In all the round and relationship of life love is ever busy blessing us. The gladness of the children's joy, their love and trust and service, lights our life. The faithfulness of friendship, and endurance, and devotion do still enrich our lives.

And yet again our fear might whisper: "Yes, he may leave us all these things, yet surely he himself shall be hidder." But lo, he himself speaks to us in his Word with exceeding great and precious promises. He gives us the manifold influences of his blessed Spirit. He meets us, not as the Judge, but reveals himself as our Father, pitiful and gracious. He gives us access to himself in prayer, and comes down to commune with us, ever waiting to be gracious. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. . . . He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

With what wonderful beauty this truth is illustrated for us in the coming of God to the world

after the first sin! Man has raised his hand in rebellion against his Maker, and now the great Creator comes forth to judgment. See how he comes. Not with thunders and lightnings as he came on Sinai; not in the whirlwind as he came to Job. He comes in the cool of the day, when peace and love walk together. He comes with the call of the Father for his child, and he who hid at the thought of God, is drawn into his presence by the sound of his voice. In grief he asks: "What is this that thou hast done?" The woman dares reply. Then comes the sentence, mercy brightening it all, as the sun edges the thunder-clouds with golden glory. In sorrow she is to bring forth her children, yet from the children should arise the world's Redeemer, and the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. By the sweat of the face is he to eat bread, yet that very toil should lighten sorrow. They must go forth from Eden, yet not alone, to meditate and repent in solitude. Out of Paradise, but not beyond the Father's love. And the first thing God did for man after the fall is an exquisite touch of tender care: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." He hath not dealt with us after our sins.

How full of meaning is the figure which completes the verse—completes, too, the truth of which it tells: *As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.* It not only

makes the height of the heaven as the measure of his mercy, but points to the heaven itself as the emblem of his mercy. Look forth upon the heaven that holds the earth with infinite expansion on every side; so far away above and below us, to right of us and left of us, for ever and ever, without beginning, without end, without limit, spreads his mercy. See again, though so great and infinite, yet how doth heaven come down and hem us in, encircling us! We stand doomed by the blue heaven, and surrounded by it. So is his mercy. It shuts me in, it arches me over, it encompasses me with favor as with a shield. Again, I walk, but lo! heaven goeth with me. I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, and still it bends over me. I can not escape from its presence. So is his mercy. I can not get beyond it, and there lieth nothing outside it.

Heaven, so infinite, with the tremendous pressure of its atmosphere, yet so lightly touching the earth that we move in it unconscious of any burden, we breathe in it without fear or restraint; so delicately balanced are its forces that no fragile flower is crushed by it; the dainty wing of the gnat is poised upon it. So is his mercy—infinite as God himself, yet gentle and tender as a mother's kiss.

The high heaven—wherein he hath set a tabernacle for the sun, and which he hath garnished with the stars—so vast is it. Yet out of it come the

sweet influences that paint the flower and unfold the daisy, and that nourish the grass-blade. So is his mercy, opening to us the kingdom of heaven, and yet stooping to lowest wants, and hushing the soul's most passing fear. The high heaven, whence come all our gifts, the light and warmth, the rain from the river of God which is full of water; the colors that make earth beautiful; the winds that sweep and sing of God; the life and sustenance of all things drop from its bounty and are drawn from its fullness. So is his mercy the source of every good. Well may the soul sing aloud of love like this. Bless the Lord, . . . and all that is within me, bless his holy name. . . . He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

But yet remains the truth that crowns and completes it all. *In our very sins he hath found opportunity for the grandest manifestation of his love.*

Sin had filled us with a dread of God.—The first utterance of fallen man and the last alike proclaim this fear: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid . . . and I hid myself." The cry of the world at the Lord's coming again is full of the same terror: "Mountains and rocks fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Sin has made the thought of God a terror to us, before whom we tremble and all within us cries, "Let not God speak with us, lest

we die.” And lo! to us there cometh the Lord of glory—not with ten thousands of his holy angels, seated in his splendor; not with eyes of flame, and face like the sun, and on his vesture and thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Not thus. He cometh as the “Fear not” of God to the world. The gentle music greets the shepherds, telling them how that they shall find the young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger. So he comes, *at home with us all*. And this is Immanuel—God with us—God in Christ Jesus bringing back the frightened world to himself. Think how that none ever feared him. The little children pressed to his side. The outcast leper fell at his feet, sure of his help and healing. The sinful woman crept for shelter in his shadow, and found heaven in his kindly notice and cleansing love. Think how the helpless and needy came instinctively to him—the blessed Brother of the world, who comes to lead us home again to the Father’s house.

Sin had blinded and hardened us.—Holiness had no longer a charm for us. And when he came, the Holy One of Israel, he had no form nor comeliness, . . . and we hid as it were our faces from Him. But the Most High God comes as a little Child, as if to move our very pity. He wanders homeless and hungry, as if he would appeal to our compassion. He, the King of heaven, stands and knocks at the door, praying us to open unto

him. Ah, most wonderful, he cometh on his way, bound, beaten, bleeding, amidst bitter taunt and anguish, as if he appealed to us: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." Verily, he hath not dealt with us after our sins!

Sin had separated us from God.—And lo! he cometh forth to find us, coming to seek and to save that which was lost. He himself passeth into the wilderness, forth into the black night and angry storm. And when he findeth us, what welcome is ours, and what fullness of joy! Surely David's memory gave its strength to this note of praise; he thinks how that he came back from that foul sin of his, and God did not keep him waiting, knocking at the door; he had not to climb up the stony steps of merit and desert. O, with what eager love the Father ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him! There is no waiting with cold suspicion, putting him through periods of probation. Blessed be God, his love needs no purgatory! And the Father said: "Bring forth the best robe (the best—nothing is too good), and put it on him; and the ring for the finger (restored to honor, too), and shoes for the feet (no want is beneath his notice). And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within

me, bless his holy name. . . . He hath not death with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

My soul, for love like this what canst thou say, what canst thou do? Such love asks and demands the strength and fullness of thy love. My Lord, the life that has cost thee so much shall be thine—forever and altogether thine. The life that thou hast borne with so patiently and tenderly, the life that thou hast begun to change and cleanse by thy grace, shall be thine, to be filled with thy glory. Take it, make it and keep it thine own. Thine, that thou mayest see in it the finished specimen of thy handiwork and be satisfied. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

XII.

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”—PSA. CIII, 13, 14.

SWEET and blessed indeed is the next theme of the psalmist. He has already found so much to sing of, that we may wonder what more there can be. Already the singer is crowned with loving-kindness and tender mercies. Already he is satisfied with goodness. He sees the righteousness of God avenging every wrong—delivering all that are oppressed. He sees infinite mercy compassing him about on every hand.

Then comes a step that may seem at first sight to go backward and downward. The crowned singer becomes God's little child, and the glorious Jehovah becomes the pitiful Father. But this, surely, is progress. A higher and richer note this, than any that he has reached before. Becoming a little child the psalmist enters the kingdom of heaven, and finds that its holy of holies, the very center of all things, is the heart of God.

This is the resting-place.—Father implies home. We weary of the glitter of the court, the splendor

of the king; but we rest in the Father's presence and in the Father's house. Our Father—here is the deepest and most constant need; here is the closest and completest relationship; here is the fullest and most abiding claim. Turn which way we will we soon reach the limit of our poor knowledge and the limit of one another's help. We look away into the darkness on all sides and are afraid. Then do we need something else than the thought of greatness or majesty,—we need the Father's hand, the Father's heart. "Sing me a bairn's song," said Dr. Guthrie, as he was dying: helpless, and facing mysteries in thought of which we are all as little children, he longed for words that told of the Father's pitiful presence. "Sing me a bairn's hymn." This is ever our resting-place—our Father's love.

Here, too, is God's most glorious attribute, or rather the summing up and completing of his attributes. Our thought of love implies something of admiration and delight. Mercy is a royal grace, which magnifies the greatness and security of the King, and has in it something of majesty. But pity is Love stooping, Love drawn down by helplessness and want. Pity is Love touched with sympathy, Love sorrowing and suffering in our sorrow. Our thoughts can get no higher than this—God our gracious and pitiful Father. Our hearts can find no further or fuller blessedness to long after than this—to be his loving and obedient

children. Bless the Lord, O my soul! Find, if thou canst, some new music with which to sing of this new mercy. The great world is no vast mechanical contrivance whose iron wheels grind on pitilessly, and whose center is but an enthroned law. Nor is there on the throne One claiming only the homage of his creatures, unmoved by human sorrow, ever alone and unapproachable. The very center and strength of all things is the love of the everlasting Father. Upon the throne of the universe sits One who holds every living soul unutterably dear, loving each with an infinite love; himself stooping to carry our sins and sorrows, enduring the shame and curse of our ill-doing that he may deliver us. This is our God, ever close beside us in our fear and ignorance and want, pitying us even as a father pitieth his children.

And here, too, we see our dignity and strength, the hope of our infinite development, in this likeness between our God and ourselves. "Like as a father . . . so the Lord." By this human relationship and these human feelings we know how God feels toward us. *Every one that loveth . . . knoweth God*—knows his heart, knows how he desires and how he grieves, and how he enjoys, and how he pities, and how he helps.

But note well that this song can only be reached by the steps that lead up to it. This strain flows only from a conscious and assured

forgiveness. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.* Then comes the discovery of this further blessedness. Forgiveness is not only a deliverance from guilt—it is the removal of all that shut out the love of God from the heart. That love is ever round about us, free and boundless as the air and the sunshine; but it is known by us only as we yield ourselves to the blessed energy of the Holy Ghost and to the grace of Christ. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me,” saith the Lord; but he takes us by the hand and leads us into the Divine Presence, and teaches us to say: Our Father who art in heaven. The Holy Spirit completes the work, carrying the consciousness of sonship further in and deeper down. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* Now, in Christ Jesus our Lord this is not merely a title by which we speak of God—it is a *relationship*. God is our Father and we are his children. *My Father*—it must be a great and glorious assurance, or we can not speak it at all. It can not be a doubtful, faltering word. It is born of such a revelation of love as that which met the prodigal when he came home with the cry—*I have sinned.* And Love saw him when he was yet a great way off, . . . and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. “Father” leapt from his lips, and that Love all compassed him about and cried: “This

my son." My soul, believe it, rest in it, rejoice in it—for thee this infinite Love waits in the heart of thy Father God; for thee the way to its fullness is opened by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for thee the Holy Ghost is given to make this so much more than a thought, a belief—to make it all an inwrought possession; the love of God shed abroad in the heart. Thine it is to look up with trust and triumph into the face of thy God, and to cry with reverent boldness—*My Father*. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Father and child.—Look into the wonderfulness of this relationship. All strength and all weakness; and yet the weakness ever having a supreme claim upon the strength, and the strength ever available for the weakness. All fullness and all want; yet the want looking up to the fullness as its own, and the fullness delighting to impart itself to the want. All wisdom and all ignorance; yet the two not separate by unlikeness, but so one that wisdom hath a joy in coming down to lead and teach. Bringing nothing and yet receiving all. Father and child.—Here is the master waited on by the servants; here are skilled hands that minister to his pleasure; artists decorate his walls; the learned have supplied the books that enrich and refresh him; here are those who add to his safety; those again who tend his gardens and bring him fruit and flowers. And within the

house is a little child, with no sense or skill to render any service, who brings no gain, who adds nothing to the master's greatness or wealth—and yet this little child is ten thousand times more to the father than all these, and all that they can render. Look up, my soul, look up to thy Father in heaven. Be bold to take it all and to triumph in the wondrous truth. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: *and such we are.*" (R. V.) Weak, thou canst bring nothing worthy of his acceptance. Ignorant, thou canst but dimly think of him. Little and foolish, thou canst not add to his majesty and greatness. Yet what tender, yearning, compassionate love is this that binds thee forever to his heart—*This my son.*

Father and child.—Look again at this wonderful relationship. The master moves amongst the servants. They may know his skill in many things; his energy, his faithfulness. His friends may know his learning, his gifts, his uprightness and kindness. How utterly ignorant of all these things is the little child! Ah, but because it is a little child, and because it is little and weak, it has a key that unlocks chambers of the heart that no others can reach. This little child can inspire larger plans and greater purposes than ever before came into the master's mind. This child draws forth a more eager care, a more tender love, a wealth of patience and pity that none else had

ever dreamed of. My soul, think not within thyself, "I can never know him. All wise and infinite, he is past finding out!" Why, thy very weakness is a revelation; thy want and helplessness are thy opportunity of knowing him as the strong and mighty could never do. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* The angels may know the glorious majesty of our God. They sweep through the universe exploring his greatness and wisdom. They come back and bow in rapturous devotion before him, veiling their faces, and crying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory." And we, alas! so little and so far off, what can we know of him? But lo! because we are weak and little, we have revelations of him which they that do excel in strength could never know. And it is as he bends over us in tender pity that the angels see another revelation of their God, and cry in wonder: *Herein is Love.*

And yet again look at this relationship. The little child brings nothing, and yet it possesses all. The house, the servants, the wealth, all wait upon him. Sonship is possession. *If children, then heirs.* My soul, well mayest thou sing aloud for very gladness. Weak, ignorant, foolish, with a thousand wants and a thousand frailties, yet thou art *his* child, and he is thy Father. What then? "Son," saith he, "thou art ever with me. and all that I have is thine."

For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.—This gives us the reason of his pity—he knows our helplessness. The little and the weak are in the way of many. They are in the way of the busy—they hinder them. In the way of the rulers—they can neither counsel nor fight. In the way of the philosopher—they can not understand. In the way of the money-maker—they neither toil nor spin. But Pity does not think they are in the way. She has room for them, and patience for them, and blessings for them. The disciples thought the little children were in Christ's way, and would have kept them from him. But he was *much displeased*. He had room in his arms and in his heart. And God has room for them; they are not in his way. In this, my soul, rejoice. Do not wrong the Lord thy God, or cheat thyself by foolish wishes that thou wert great or wise, as if then there would be some chance for thee. God has room for thee as thou art; he longs for all that thy weakness can bring to him. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

Let us ask ourselves—What is it in the little child that claims and draws forth our tenderness and love? The answer that comes at once to the mind is—*its helplessness*. The little child has wants as we have, and can do nothing to supply them. It has a life more delicate and sensitive

than ours, yet it can do nothing to take care of itself. Very wonderful is this helplessness of infancy, quite unlike anything else in the world. All insect life and all fish are able at once to take their place in the great world and to care for themselves. Every other creature can move toward its source of life, and in a few days or weeks at most, needs nothing more than it can do for itself. But the infant has neither instinct nor understanding; can not even move towards its source of supply. Surely when the angels bent over the firstborn, it must have been with awe, and they might well have whispered: "Is it not too great a risk to let this wondrous creature lie in such helplessness?" That very helplessness is its strength. Pity is its provision and safety. In this relation of fatherhood and motherhood there lies that which makes the child so dear, because it is so little and helpless; which is not only content but glad to plan for it and provide for it, and meet its wants day and night. Because it is so weak and little its place is right against the mother's heart, screened by the mother's arms, where her eyes rest upon it, and where she catches the first sign of its complaint. So the Lord pitieth them that fear him. *For* he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

But this early helplessness is very little and shortlived compared with the deeper wants that lie within us, and which unfold themselves with

after years. We are not conscious of our helplessness until we begin to come out of it, or except as we see it in others. Great wants are there within us which as yet we can scarcely guess. And over these our Heavenly Father bends with infinite pity, supplying all our need. Think again, how that the babe lies in the mother's arms, all unconscious of the unwearied love that toils and watches day and night. So do we lie, without any desire toward God, without any consciousness of our dependence upon him, without any gratitude. And lo! he meets us with his gentleness and pity, seeking to lead us step by step into the knowledge of himself, into the life of his children, and on to the stature of the man in Christ Jesus.

Do not let us put all this away by saying, with a sigh: "Yes, but in the case of the children all is innocence. But our darkness and helplessness toward God is our curse and shame." Well, sadly true, but what of that? Here lies some deserted child, itself a very burden of accursed shame and foul dishonor. Shall we therefore turn away from it and leave it to perish? No, indeed; our pity is deepened and softened, and finds another claim in this. Poor little thing—its heritage of shame is not its fault. Certainly we have not far to seek for proof that we have inherited a nature miserably prone to evil. But of this be sure—that our very sinfulness has not shut us out from the yearning pity and love of

our Father in heaven. The gospel is the gospel because it is the tidings of an infinite mercy for the guilty; an infinite pity for the fallen; a salvation for the lost. My soul, thou canst take it as thine own, without reserve, without fear.

Let us glance at some of these deeper wants within us which reveal the pitifulness of our Father.

Take our twofold origin.—The little child is of the earth, and has a thousand wants which earth supplies. The father and mother secure for the child home, food, warmth, clothing. They teach and train it in relation to the earth—to walk upon it, and to work in it, and to turn it to account. But as we pass out of that childhood of the lower life we begin to find ourselves entering upon another childhood. We have another origin, another nature, with its wants that need to be satisfied, and its capacities that need to be developed; great wants that earth can not touch; of which even the father and mother can only tell us where to go to find the supply. We have another nature that goes hungry and alone, dimly conscious of itself. *He knoweth our frame.* And even as the mother stoops to help the little one, leading it on, so God bends over us, and meets the want and helplessness of the spiritual life, and gently trains and develops the child of his heart.

Thus are there deeps within this mystery of our humanity which only God sees; wants that

he only can know and pity and help; another child-life which appeals to the Father of spirits. Take again, *the diverse claims of this twofold life*. We learn to walk by sight. We are hemmed in by the seen. We reason from what we see, and hear, and handle; these are the guides of our understanding. But there comes to us a whole series of claims and commandments that require us to walk by faith; to trust the Unseen, to yield our love and service to One whom no man hath seen at any time; to find the strength and wisdom and joy of our lives in serving and pleasing him. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." How tenderly does he bend over us; how patiently he leads us; how wisely he guides our steps to himself, little by little, and by a thousand gentle lessons lifting up our eyes and teaching us to see afar off. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

The Lord pitieth . . . for he knoweth our frame.—Do not the words suggest the *individualizing* of his love? The Father knows the constitution and temperament of his children, and each has a distinct and separate claim on his regard. He knows the quick and gifted one who has but to glance at the page and can repeat the lesson by heart; and he knows the duller child who must bend over the book for an hour, and then can but repeat it imperfectly, and his pity deals with them

accordingly. Mistakes mean much in one case, and but little in the other. Think amongst God's children what infinite variety of character and temperament are claims upon the pity of our Father in heaven. Think again, how circumstances and inheritance and the experience of life may make faith and trust a thousand-fold more difficult to one than to another; and how that which is spiritual and meditative is almost natural to some, whilst to others it is a struggle. Think how diversely are distributed the gifts that fit us for active work. He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust. How gracious and gentle are his different dealings; what perfect knowledge prompts and guides his wisdom.

He knows, too, the physical nature.—What weakness of body means, and weariness; how they dull the spiritual sense, and make the wings of the soul droop. The father comes into the midst of the children—here is one, peevish, fretful—the elbow on the table, propping the head; the lesson unlearned; the tone, the manner, the very position all contrary to the law. But the father looks again; the child's face is flushed, the eyes are heavy, the little one is poorly. At once the tone is not of reproof, but of tender pity. He knoweth the frame. In place of punishment he seeks to soothe and comfort. So the Lord pitieth.

Such, my soul, is thy Father God, to whom, when thou canst not sing, thou canst come for

solace and for rest. Do not grieve that Love by doubting it. Thy sin and peril is that thou dost limit it in anywise. Let his great love have the gladness of thy fullest faith; like a little child, be thine a love untroubled in its utter confidence, complete in its deep satisfaction. With him as thy Father, neither the past nor the future can ever work thee harm, nor in anything can that Almighty Goodness fail thee. *Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

XIII.

“As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.”—PSA. CIII, 15, 18.

THE psalmist sets beside each other the short-lived man and the everlasting mercy of God. We shall miss very much if the two are taken only by way of contrast. The verses are an unfolding of what has gone before—*like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.* The two thoughts thus become a *consequence* rather than a contrast, the one following from the other. Because we are like the grass, the mercy of God stoops to us; because “he knoweth our frame,” he reveals his mercy as everlasting.

So, then, the frontispiece is not of two pictures side by side—it is one; a picture of a few grass blades that tremble in the breeze amidst which

spring up the flowers of the field; and round about there is the blue heaven flecked with stainless clouds, and the fair earth all filled with bounteous provision—the sun, the air, the dew, the soil, the rain, all waiting upon the grass and ministering to it.

Here, then, is an emblem of man.—He is like the grass. It looks a very poor and contemptible comparison—the noble and stately man to be likened to the grass of the field. The lion for its strength; the eagle for its lofty flight; the dove for its innocence; the lily for its beauty—these are the things chosen as his emblems—but not the grass. It is so commonplace: a thing without individuality or separateness; a thing so low down, ever dwelling so near the earth; so easily trodden under foot; so soon withered and passing away. The grass—it is a thing for such low uses and of such little worth. Surely the diamond and gems of great price were fitter emblems of man; or at least the iron and stone and wood—things capable of being turned to some noble purpose. But grass—a thing of all others the lowest and least.

As the grass—my soul, humbling though it be, take it to thyself. Of the earth earthy art thou too; springing from the earth; dependent on the earth; going down again so quickly into the earth: to-day in thy prime, to-morrow gone. To-day pushing upward and dreaming of the stars; to-

morrow nipped by the wind, and the place which knew us shall know us no more.

How much it may rebuke within us as we meditate upon it amidst our eagerness and feverish unrest! Think of a grass blade torn with eager ambitions! Think of a grass blade fretting under burdens of care, or troubling day and night about the future! "Silly blade, thou art here but for a day: these things about thee are not worth so much eager hope or fear. Take what thou hast and make the best of it, for to-morrow thou wilt be gone." My soul, test thy plans, and check thy desires, and weigh thy cares by these words: *As for man, his days are as grass.* Thy only wisdom is to live without overeagerness about anything, neither expecting too much nor fretting too greatly, come what may; for it will soon have done with thee, and thou wilt soon have done with it.

But the grass has a cheerier word than that.

If this were all it might urge us to the recklessness of despair. "We are little and short-lived—it matters nothing what we do, therefore let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Let it preach to us, this trembling blade, and let the heart be opened to hear its gracious message. Think of the tiny seed—a thing so little that none would notice it—tossed by the breeze, brushed aside by the lightest touch. Now it lies prisoned in the dark earth. And some day it begins to dream of

life and service, and in gladness whispers its dream. The very earth-grains might laugh it to scorn. "Thou come to anything! Never! Why, the corn has furrows plowed for it; the land is fenced and drained and cleaned and dressed. The sower goes forth to scatter it carefully; and the watchers protect it from the birds. And when it begins to grow, careful hands hoe it and dig up the weeds that would choke it. But who cares for thee, a tiny thing like thee? No sower troubles to plow for thee; no hand casts thee forth—the grass of the field. None watch thee and drive thine enemies away—trodden under foot, down in the dark, how canst thou ever hope to reach the light! Do not be vain enough to think that the sun is going to waste his warmth upon thee when he might be fetching up the golden corn, the stately tree, and fragrant flower and luscious fruits."

But it is all right. God causeth the grass to grow. Tiny as it is and insignificant, the seed is fitted to its place. Far off and busied as the great sun is in lighting a million worlds, yet he sends down his warmth and finds out the seed and whispers sweet messages of hope to it. The clouds stoop to bless it, and bid it be of good cheer, until at length the root begins to set itself in the ground, and the stem thrusts itself up into the light.

My soul, what then though thy days be as grass? Say not within thyself that God's help and wisdom and care are for the great and promi-

ment of the earth. Because thou art so low down, his mercy stoops the lower; because of thy hindrances, his mercy is the more helpful. If God causeth the grass to grow, talk not of thy weakness, or of thy circumstances. Good is it, and safe indeed, to be little, if our helplessness just lies down in the arms of his mercy and delights itself in his safe keeping.

Yet again, I think I hear the mocking earth that scorns the tiny seed: "Even if thou dost ever get up into the light, who will take care of thee—a worthless thing as thou art! Thou hast no beauty like the flowers. Thou hast no fair blossoms and no ripe fruit. Shall sun and showers waste themselves upon thee, a common grass-blade?"

Soul, what sayest thou to this? So worthless as well as so weak, canst thou venture to think within thyself that Almighty Power can ever come to thy help? Fear not. In all the round world there is not a more wonderful bit of work, nothing more exquisitely beautiful, than the trembling grass blade. The complicated mechanism of the hand or the eye does not reveal a greater marvel of skill. "The finest ribbon of man's manufacture can not for a moment be compared in richness and transparency of texture to its blade. A model of symmetry, elegance, and strength is each little spear of grass that pierces the sod and shimmers in the sunshine. Ask the skillful artist to con-

struct for you a plant that will bear uninjured the summer's heat and the winter's frost, which will rise elastic from the heavy footstep and the cumbersome snow-wreath, which will speedily reform the parts that have been broken off or injured; which will wave with the wind, and stand upright under the rain and hail; which will unite elegance with strength, slenderness with beauty, and eminent usefulness with all,—and how vain would be his attempts! Yet all these opposite qualities unite in the lowly grass, and fit it admirably for the purpose which it serves, and the circumstances in which it grows.”*

My soul, is it not well to be “as the grass?” Shall not thy God care much more for thee, and fit thee for thy surroundings, and make thee always to triumph? Whatever thou art in thyself, in *him* be glad. What power and wisdom and lovingkindness are thine in him!

Listen again: “Only a grass blade,” saith the enemy scornfully. Well, see how thy God clothes “the grass of the field.” “Its root is more fibrous and tenacious than that of any other plant. The stem is hollow and invested as if by some system of electrotype with a thin coating of flint, and thus it combines the utmost strength with lightness and elegance, so that it rarely gives way under the most violent storms. The leaves are spear-

* Macmillan's “Bible Teachings in Nature,” pp. 54, 55.

shaped and are strongly ribbed with threads of flinty fiber; they are long, narrow, and alternate, in order to present as small a surface and give as light a hold as possible to the winds; they are destitute of branches so as to qualify them for growing together in masses without suffering from want of light and air—the whole stem being succulent and covered with spiracles or air-holes, thus acting as lungs along with the leaves.” So God clothes the grass of the field. Such wisdom and power do meet and manifest themselves in every part of it. What, then, hath the Heavenly Father for his child? My soul, let thyself go with a glad, unquestioning, triumphant confidence right into the love of thy God. He can never, never fail thee. Weak, insignificant, short-lived as the grass thou mayest be, yet, like the grass, thou shalt be most graciously cared for. With such a God as thine, thou canst fear no evil. The very grass is the assurance and pledge of his unfailing goodness and his unerring wisdom in everything. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

And yet again I think I hear the earth grains muttering: “Nay, grass blade, do not think *thou* art ever going to *do any good* in the great world—here to-day and gone to-morrow; scarcely come before thou art cut down and withered. If thou wert going to be the graceful palm-tree, or the

cedar upon whom the centuries do wait, it might be worth while to thrust out thy roots and to lift up thine head. If thou wert going to be the stately oak, or ash 'for nothing ill,' there might be some reason for thine existence. But a grass blade!" Brave grass blade, it has seen enough now to speak up and tell its confidence: "Why, he who made the palm-tree and the oak has made me too, and put me where I am. He has got some good for me to do or he would not have made me. I do not know what it is, but I will just drink in the rain and the sunshine, and he will see to it that I am good for something."

Good for something! Why, the grass makes up a good half of the strength of the world. It is worth more than the gold and the flashing gems; more than the stately trees of the forest; more than all the flowers that deck the earth. The tiny grass blade takes hold of earth and heaven, takes hold of sun and air and rain and soil, and turns them, by a wondrous chemistry, past our understanding, into food for the cattle and the sheep—and they grow up fitted for man's service by the grass of the field. And more than that, the grass becomes the snowy fleeces of wool which clothes us, and the toughened hide by which we are shod; and men and women and children give thanks to God for the precious gifts that come to us through the grass of the field. Our very lives are dependent upon it, next only to the corn. As

the grass, my soul, let hopes and dreams of usefulness greet thee in the emblem.

Less obvious, but not less real and beneficent, is the *power* of the grass. The sweeping wind, the raging sea, the thundering avalanche, these are the things of might, defiant, terrible. Strange, then, is it to think of "the grass of the field" screening our mother earth, and protecting her from these destructive forces; laying upon them a charm so that they are powerless for evil. Each tiny grass blade is a lightning-conductor, drawing down the electricity to refresh and bless the earth. Again, the grass thrusts out its matted roots into the sand and binds it together so that the winds can no more drive it before them; and thus it erects a bulwark that sets a bound to the ocean. On the ledges and steep sides of the mountains it similarly binds together the loosened soil, knitting thus into use that which otherwise would slip down in destructive masses like the snow. The soil that would be turned into blinding dust or carried away by the floods is held in its place by the subtle power of the grass. We are told that "it is impossible to imagine the disastrous effects that would be wrought over the whole earth were the disintegration of the elements not kept in check by the apparently insignificant but actually irresistible emerald scepter of the grass. Earth would lose alike its vegetation and its inhabitants, and become a gigantic lifeless cinder." *As the grass*

—little, insignificant, short-lived, but not therefore without use in God's great world—the very anchor of the earth is this same grass which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven.

As the grass.—Does the emblem seem to remind us of the commonplace, the dull monotony of human life, the great dead-level of humanity; like the grass, a thing without individuality; a dreary sameness, having, it is true, some place in the round of drudgery and service, but all unconscious, incapable of majesty, nobility, beauty? A thing scarcely emerging from the ground before it is done with forever.

Once more I would venture to quote from Macmillan: "No proof of the Creator's care in ministering to the higher tastes and capacities of man is more striking than the abounding and universal beauty of the grass. In every landscape it is the most conspicuous object, the ground color on which nature embroiders her varied patterns, and from the midst of which the gay hues of flower come forth in greater brilliancy by the force of contrast to arrest the admiring gaze. What can be lovelier than the meadows in May? . . . And when the season advances, and the daisies in thousands open their round innocent eyes in wonder among it, and the buttercups spread their cloth of gold, it seems as if a larger and a brighter feeling of life came with the lovely spectacle, and as

if every tiny spear of grass bore the admiring spirit upon it from the decays of earth nearer to the glory and fullness of heaven. . . . The eye soon tires of flaunting flowers, but it never wearies of the modest livery of the grass. Its simple verdure is earth's chosen robe, the household dress of our common mother, and none else becomes her half so well."

So then, my soul, do thou bear thyself right bravely in the great world. *As the grass*—so little art thou, so short-lived, so insignificant, yet over thee, like the blue heaven, stretches the infinite lovingkindness of thy God. His mercy flows about thee on every hand, encompassing thee. In ten thousand various forms that mercy waits upon thee and ministers to thee. Give thyself, then, right up to his care. Let him have his own way with thee. Seek but the grace to hold thyself rightly towards all things. Then be assured that out of thee he can bring worth and beauty and blessedness. Let thy life be the simple and unbroken round of trust and love and praise. *Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*

XIV.

“The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”—PSA. CIII, 19.

So, THEN, my soul, thy life must be a life of praise. Everywhere God's goodness meets thee. Round about thee always is this infinite love, with unfailling wisdom seeking to fulfill his glorious purposes concerning thee. *His kingdom ruleth over all*—therefore canst thou find nothing which is not matter for praise, since there is nothing which is not the matter of thy Lord's gracious permission, or planning, or control. *Over all*—nowhere canst thou step outside his realm, nor in anything get beyond his care and government. *Over all*—therefore take all as from God; hold all as for God; and by thy gratitude give all back to God again, and thus complete the circle, making him the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending of all things.

Pray for the gift and spirit of praise. Covet it earnestly as one of God's best gifts—the crown and completion of all his other gifts. Exercise thyself in the art and habit of praise. Linger at the throne of grace until the heart is tuned and

the soul is filled with the sense of the goodness of God. His mercies are ever new. Let the song with which thou dost greet them be a new song,—a song fresh and living, springing from the depths of the soul. It is well if we can put on the garments of praise before we draw near to God; but surely we should never leave his presence without them. Let us be ashamed and saddened that so often we have come to God in prayer, but have forgotten to bring the incense of praise. None hath such gladness in the gladness of his child as our Father in heaven. “Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days,” was a commandment given under the law; and in the gospel that brief summer is to spread through all the year and to fill all seasons—*rejoice in the Lord always*.

As we journey toward the south and get nearer to the heavenly city, surely the light ought to be growing brighter and our joy becoming fuller, and praise to be more constant! There is a very beautiful device by which the Japanese are accustomed to express their wishes for their friends. It is the figure of a drum in which the birds have built their nest. The story told of it is that once there lived a good king so anxiously concerned for the welfare of his people that at the palace gate he set a drum, and whoever had any wrong to be redressed or any want should beat the drum, and at once, by day or night, the king would grant the suppliant an audience and relief. But throughout the land there

reigned such prosperity and contentment that none needed to appeal for anything, and the birds built their nest within it, and filled it with the music of their song. Such gracious access is granted to us ever by the King of Heaven, and day and night his ready hearing and his help are within the reach of all that come to him; but of all men most blessed are they who have found on earth a blessedness in which all want is forgotten, and trust rests so assured of safety in the Father's care that prayer gives place to ceaseless praise. They *rejoice in the Lord always*.

This life of praise is more than an act of the soul. It is rather an attitude and a relationship toward God. Such a confidence in him, and such quick sensitiveness to discern his presence, that every gift reveals his love, and every need suggests his care, and fear instinctively tightens the grasp about his hand. O blessed, most blessed is it, when every breath doth stir the music of the heart into thanksgiving. How beautiful a picture is that which the psalmist sets before us here—a picture of perfected praise—*bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word*. They stand about the throne with head bent low in reverent homage, eager to catch the whisper of the almighty will; then sweeping forth on their strong pinions, making sweet music as they go. Obedience *must* underlie our praise, as the granite underlies the

woods and meadows of the earth; as the bones build up the man. Without obedience we can have no music, no rhythm in our lives—all is but a clanging cymbal, a brazen din. Obedience—exact, complete obedience—is the very spirit and strength of all praise. “Unfaith in aught” is, as one sings, “the little rift within the lute.” What of the harp if the strings be slack or unresponsive to the master’s touch? *Obedience*—that first, that always, *hearkening to the voice of his word*. But not obedience only. Duty, “in large measure, well pressed out, but measured always,” may be but a rigid and a frigid thing. There is an obedience that is almost more provoking than open rebellion and defiance—a sullen and stupid obedience that creeps with unwilling steps, and that obeys with a rebellious heart. It is the service with which Israel provoked the Most High. *Because thou servedst not the Lord God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord thy God shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck*. Serving the Lord with gladness is the only acceptable service. The picture of the psalmist is brought down to earth and put within the compass of our daily prayer, and so within the reach of our hope and possession, now and here. *Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven*. He who taught us this prayer did so because of our

lack, and for his own sake and for ours he is glad to answer it abundantly. *Serve the Lord with gladness*—that is the perfection of service, when obedience is a delight. It is an art to be learnt, and to be mastered only by exercise; and he who has learnt it has found the very secret of heaven's own blessedness. It is the service set forth by the vestments of the high priest when he went to minister before the Lord. He was to be arrayed in the ephod "all of blue;" and the golden breastplate, whereon were written the names of Israel, was borne upon his heart. And ever as he moved the music of the golden bells rang from his robes, "Beneath upon the hem of the robe thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about . . . and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord." Our gracious God is surely worthy of such service. For his sake let the heart be set with eager longing and resoluteness on this life of praise, and let there be the daily exercise and effort after a fuller thankfulness.

And for our neighbor's sake let us seek his blessed life. Gratitude is the sweetest and most successful witness for God. It is as if we carried openly, "known and read of all men," the receipt acknowledging his unfailing mercy. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine," saith the wise man; a thankful spirit carries sunshine and warmth

wherever it goes. There are men whose presence nips and withers one like a frost, and where they are it is icy winter always. Surely the people who do know their God should bring with them the time of the singing of birds; and should woo the flowers from their graves, and tip the very thorns with fragrant blossoms and beauty. The bare memory of the happy hired servants saved the prodigal—servants who looked as if they had enough to be thankful for. As he sat amidst the swine, shivering and hungry, he thought of the little lad who went whistling to his work; he saw again the sturdy plowman, what a cheery fellow he was; again he heard the maidservant who made the place ring with her music all day long. He thought of the old laborer, dried up in the winds and suns of seventy years, and how that the master bade the old man do what he could, and if he could do nothing else, he might come up to the house for a meal—and he could generally manage that. That saved the son. "If I am going to be a hired servant anywhere, it shall be there," said he; and he arose and came to his father. What an infinite mercy would it be if we could get rid of the grumbling, fault-finding folk who call themselves Christians; whose souls are ill-fed, ill-clad, and perishing with hunger! They are a libel upon the bounty and faithfulness of our God. We need some island in the tropics where those frozen souls may possibly be thawed, and where their evil influence

may be limited to each other. *Serve the Lord with gladness*—my soul, be that thy marching order, thy motto, and thy aim. Keep the flag flying and let the music cheer thy way; thou art in the King's service, and his Presence goeth with thee ever.

It must have been with a sigh of envy that the melancholy Carlyle cried: "Give us, O give us, the man who sings to himself. Be his occupation what it may, he is not one of those who follow the same pursuit with a sullen sullenness. He will do more in the same time,—he will do it better,—he will persevere longer. One is scarcely sensible of fatigue whilst he marches to music. The very stars are said to make harmony as they revolve in their spheres. Wondrous is the strength of cheerfulness; altogether past calculation its powers of endurance. Efforts, to be permanently useful, must be uniformly joyous—a spirit all sunshine, graceful from very gladness, beautiful because bright."

His kingdom ruleth over all.—Some time since in the early spring I was going out at my door when round the corner came a blast of the east wind—defiant and pitiless, fierce and withering—sending a cloud of dust before it. I was just taking the latchkey from the door as I said, half angrily, "*I wish the wind would —*" I was going to say *change*; but the word was checked, and the sentence was never finished. As I went on my

way the incident became a parable to me. There came an angel holding out a key; and he said, "My Master sends thee his love, my brother, and he bids me give you this."

"What is it?" I asked, wondering, and timidly touching it.

"*The key of all winds,*" said the angel, and disappeared.

Now indeed I hurried away up into the heights where the winds come, and stood amongst their caves.

"I will have done with the east wind at any rate—that shall plague us no more," I cried; and calling in that friendless wind, I slammed the door, and heard the echoes ringing in the hollow places. I turned the key triumphantly—"There," I said, "now we have done with that."

"What shall I choose in its place?" I asked myself, looking about me. "The south wind is pleasant,"—and I thought of the lambs, and the young life on every hand, and the flowers that had begun to deck the hedgerows.

But as I set the key within the door it began to burn in my hand.

"What am I doing?" I cried; "who knows what mischief I may bring about? How do I know what the fields want! Ten thousand thousand things of ill may come of this foolish wish of mine."

Bewildered and ashamed, I looked up and prayed that the Lord would send his angel yet

again to take the key, and for my part I promised that I would never want to have it any more. But lo, the Lord himself stood by me. He reached his hand to take that key, and as I laid it down I saw that it rested against the sacred wound-print.

It hurt me indeed that I could ever have murmured against anything wrought by him who bare such sacred tokens of his love. Then he took the key and hung it on his girdle.

"Dost thou keep the key of the winds?" I asked.

"I do, my child," he answered, graciously.

And lo, I looked again, and there hung all the keys of all my life.

He saw my look of amazement, and asked, "*Didst thou not know, my child, that my kingdom ruleth over all?*"

"Over all, my Lord!" I answered; "then is it not safe for me to murmur at anything?"

Then did he lay his hand upon me tenderly. "My child," he said, "thy only safety is in everything to love and trust and praise."

So far the parable—now comes the prose. Some few weeks afterwards a friend called my attention to two letters that appeared in *The Times* newspaper, written by a foremost authority on matters of agriculture. The first was in February. The writer stated that he had just been through England and much of France, and found that the long-continued

and incessant rains had brought the land to such a condition that it would require at least three years to restore it to an ordinary condition. In April came another letter, stating that the east wind had done in three months what ordinarily would have taken three years to accomplish! Then the words came to me again with a fuller meaning: "*My child, thy only safety is in everything to love and trust and praise.*"

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Date Due

MT 11 '38

D 7, '38

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