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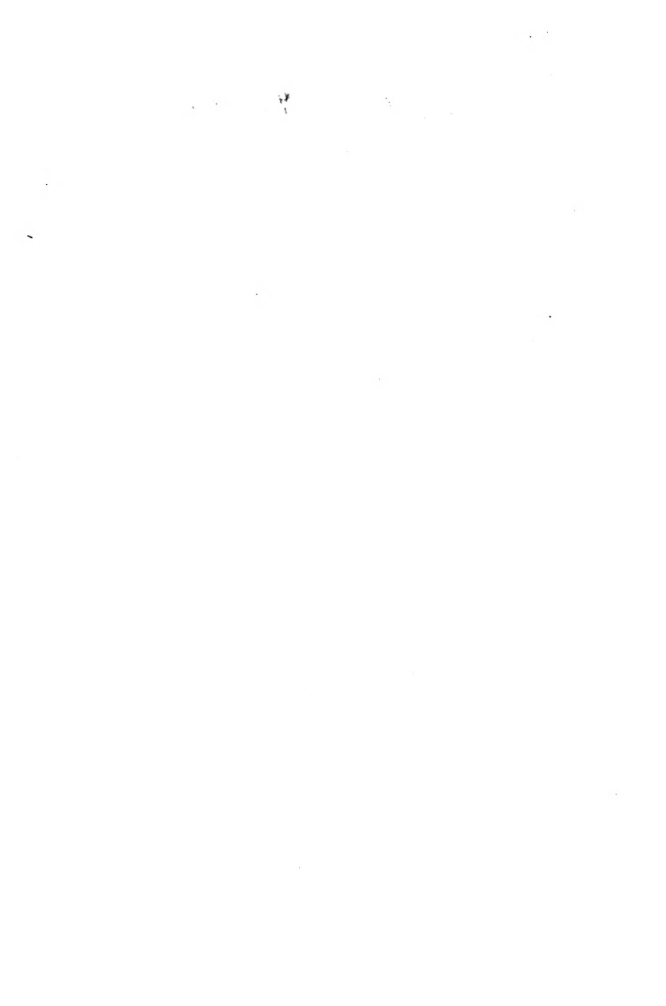
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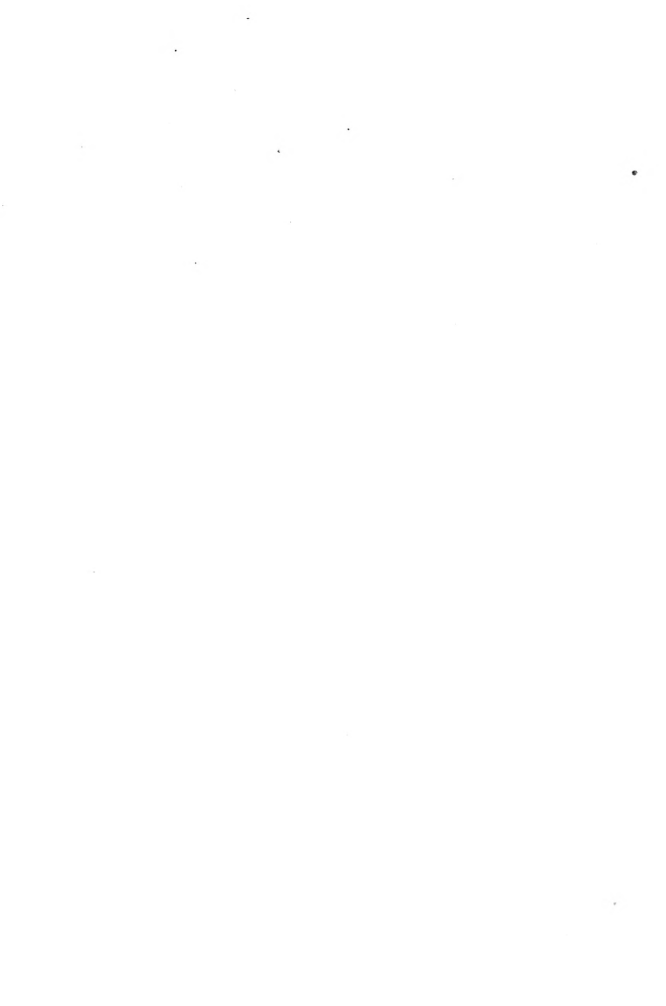
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Sanford H. Smith

Peoria, Dec 17/62







**SCRIPTURE HISTORY;**  
OR  
**CONTEMPLATIONS**  
ON THE  
**HISTORICAL PASSAGES**  
OF THE  
**OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.**

BY THE RIGHT REV. JOSEPH HALL, D. D.,  
BISHOP OF NORWICH.

ABRIDGED BY  
REV. GEORGE HENRY GLASSE.

“And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”—LUKE 24 · 27.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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The name of *Joseph Hall*, Bishop of Norwich, is remembered with veneration at the distance of two centuries from the period in which he flourished. Few, if any, of the fathers of the English Church have left behind them such illustrious memorials of learning, piety, and unwearied industry in the cause of truth. The blamelessness of his life—the fervor of his charity—the variety and importance of his theological writings, have been so many irresistible claims on posterity to preserve him from the oblivion into which most of his contemporaries have fallen. A wise and judicious writer of his own times, Sir Henry Wotton, distinguished him as the *Christian Seneca*. He might have proceeded further. He might have called him the *Chrysostom* of England.

The life and sufferings of this eminent servant of God have been so carefully transmitted to the present times, that it will here be sufficient simply to mention, that he was born at Ashby de la Zouch, A. D. 1574—that his education (which commenced at the free-school endowed in the place of his birth) was completed, under many difficulties and disadvantages, at Emanuel College, Cambridge—that he was successively Rector of Halstead, Minister of Waltham-Cross, Domestic Chaplain to the Prince of Wales, Prebendary of Wolverhampton, Dean of Worcester, Bishop of Exeter, and, lastly, Bishop of

Norwich—where he suffered bitter persecution in the turbulent times which succeeded the murder of his Sovereign, and where he died in an honorable and dignified poverty, A.D. 1656, in the eighty-second year of his age. He was one of four deputed to represent the Church of England at the Synod of Dort in 1618, but having attended for two months, he was compelled to return home by the failure of his health.

The following pages are commended to the public with the earnest hope, that in these times of lukewarmness and depravity, they may promote the glory of God, and diffuse more widely the knowledge of sacred truth—opening prospects of joy to the afflicted soul, and representing to the eye of faith Christ the End of the Law and the Fullness of the Gospel, who is over all, God blessed for evermore. **AMEN.**

# CONTEMPLATIONS

ON

## THE SCRIPTURE HISTORY.



### 1.—THE CREATION.

What can I see, O God, in thy creation, but miracles of omnipotence? Thou madest something of nothing; and of that something, all things. It is to the praise of us men, if, when we have matter, we can give it fashion: thou gavest a being to matter, without form; thou gavest a form to that matter, and a glory to that form. Wherein can we now distrust thee, who hast thus fully proved thyself to be the God that doest wonders?

Thou mightest have made all the world perfect in an instant, but thou wouldst not. How should we deliberate in all *our* actions, which are so subject to imperfection, since it pleased thine infinite perfection, not out of need, to take leisure! Neither did thy wisdom herein proceed in *time* only, but in *degrees*. First, thou madest things which have being without life—next, those which have life and being—lastly, those which have being, life, reason. Thus we ourselves first live the life of vegetation, then of sense, of reason afterwards. When the heaven and the earth were created in their rude matter, there was neither day nor light; but presently thou madest both light and day. How vainly do we hope to be perfect at once! It is well for us, if, through many degrees, we rise to our consummation.

But, alas, what was the very heaven itself without light? How confused! how formless! Like a fair body without a soul—like a soul without thee. Thou art light; and in thee is no darkness at all. O how incomprehensibly glorious is the light that is in thee, since one glimpse of this created light gave so lively a glory to all thy workmanship! Shine thou, O God, into the recesses of my soul, and in thy light I shall see light.

But whence, O God, was that original light? The sun was not made till the fourth day—light, the first. Thou, who madest the sun, madest the light *before* the sun, that so light might depend upon thee, and not upon any part of thy creation. Thy power will not be limited to means. It was easy for thee to make a heaven without a sun, light without a heaven, time without its periodical revolutions. We creatures need not one another, so long as we have thee. A day will come, when we shall have light again without the sun—thou wilt be our Sun—thy presence our light. Light is sown for the righteous. That light, which thou shalt then give us, will make us shine like the sun in glory.

And now the light, which was for three days dispersed through the whole heavens, is united into the body of the sun. One star is the treasury of light to heaven and earth. Thus, O God, the waters by thy command are gathered into one place, the sea—thus wilt thou gather thy saints from all parts of the universe to be partakers of thy joy. We are as thy heavens in their first imperfection. Be thou our sun, into which all our light may be gathered!

Yet was this light by thee interchanged with darkness. What an instructive lesson hast thou thus imparted to thy creatures! The day dies into night, and rises into morning again, that we may not expect stability here below. It is always day with thee above—the night savoreth only of mortality. O Lord, our night



is far spent—our day is at hand—teach us to cast off the works of darkness, and to put upon us the armor of light.

How fitly, how wisely are all the parts disposed in this thine enlightened frame! Behold all purity *above*; that which is less excellent *below*. Each element is superior to other, that by these degrees of ascending perfection our thoughts might rise to the top of all splendor, and know thine empyreal heaven to be as much more glorious than the visible, as *that* excels the earth. O how miserable is the place of our pilgrimage compared with our home! We think one island great, the earth, scarce measurable. If we were in heaven with these eyes, the whole earth would then seem to us as a grain in the balance, or as a moat in the sunbeam. The greatness of thy work, O God, is little inferior to its majesty. But oh, what a glorious heaven hast thou spread over our heads! With what a precious canopy hast thou encircled our inferior world! What gems of light hast thou set above us! Kings build not cottages, but magnificent palaces—so hast thou done, O King of Glory! If the *pavement* of thine heaven be so splendid, what shall we think of that which yet is unseen! If this sun be so radiant, what is the brightness of its Creator? If such a sky be prepared for the use and benefit of us sinners upon earth, how bright shall those eternal tabernacles be which thou hast prepared for thy children in heaven!

Behold then, in this stately building, three distinct stages: this lowest heaven for fowls, for vapors, for meteors—the second for the stars—the third for thine angels and saints. The first is thine outward court, open for all—the second is the body of thy covered temple, wherein are those candles of heaven perpetually burning—the third is thine holy of holies. In the first is tumult and vanity—in the second, immutability and

rest—in the third, glory and blessedness. The first we feel—the second we see—the third we believe.

But to descend to this lowest and meanest region, wherewith our senses are more acquainted—what marvels do even here present themselves! There are thy clouds, thy treasuries of rain—there they hang and move, though weighty with their burden—how they are upheld, and by what means they fall we know not, and wonder. There are thy streams of light, blazing and falling stars, fires darted up and down in many forms, hollow openings, and as it were gulfs in the sky, bright circles about the moon, snows, hail. There are thy subtle winds, which we hear and feel, yet neither can see their substance nor know their causes—whence and whither they pass, and what they are, thou knowest. If we go down to the great deep, we are there at a loss whether to wonder most at the element itself or the guests it contains. How doth that sea of thine roar, and foam, and swell, as if it would swallow up the earth! Thou stayest the rage of it by an insensible violence, and by a natural miracle confinest its waves. I say nothing of those hidden treasures which thy wisdom hath deposited in the bowels of the earth and sea—what innumerable wonders doth the very face of nature offer us! Which of these herbs, flowers, trees, leaves, seeds, fruits, is there, what beast, what reptile wherein we may not see the footsteps of a Deity?—wherein we do not read infinite power and skill, convinced that He who made the angels and stars of heaven, made also the creeping thing that creepeth on the earth? O God, the heart of man is too limited to admire sufficiently even that he treads upon. How shall we speak of thee, the Maker of these? O Lord, how wonderful are thy works in all the world! In wisdom hast thou made them all. Thou spakest and they were done—thy will is the word—and thy word the deed. Thine hand is not now

shortened—thy word is still equally effectual—all things still obey thee. Say thou the word, and our souls shall be made new again: say thou the word, and our bodies shall be repaired from the dust.

---

## 2.—PARADISE.

But, O God, what a little lord thou hast made over this great world! When I consider the heavens, the sun, moon, and the stars, Lord, what is man? Yet none but he can see what thou hast done; none but he can admire and adore thee in what he seeth: how had he need to do nothing but this, since only he can do it!

It is lawful for us to praise thee in ourselves. All thy creation hath not more wonder in it than one of us. Other creatures thou madest by thy mere command; man, by a divine consultation: others at once; man thou didst first form, then inspire: others in several shapes; man, in thine own image: others, with qualities fit for service; man, for dominion. How should we be consecrated to thee above all others, since thou hast thus distinguished us above all! First, thou didst create the world and furnish it; then broughtest thou in thy tenant to possess it. Thou that madest the earth ready for us before we had a being, hast by the same mercy decorated a place in heaven for us, while we are yet on earth. The stage was fully prepared; then was man brought thither, both as an actor and spectator, that he might neither be idle nor discontented. Behold, thou hast prepared the earth for his use, the heaven for his contemplation, and himself in his soul and body, an epitome of heaven and earth. Even this mortal part, vile as it is in respect of the other, as it is thine, O God, I

contemplate with wonder—for lo, this heap of earth hath an outward reference to heaven. Yet if this body be compared to the soul, what is it but a mask to a beautiful face; a coarse case to a rich instrument, a wall of clay that encompasses a treasure? Man was made last, because he was worthiest: the soul was inspired last, because yet more precious. O God, who madest it, replenish it, possess it—dwell thou in it now, and hereafter receive it to thyself. The body was made of earth, common to its fellow-creatures—the soul derived immediately from above. The body lay senseless upon earth like itself—the breath of life made it what it is; and that breath was from thee. Sense, motion, reason are infused into it at once. Thou, who by thy breath gavest thy disciples thy Holy Spirit, didst also breathe on the body, and gavest it a living spirit. To thee only are we indebted, without any intermediate agency, for our nobler part. Our flesh is from flesh—our spirit is from the God of spirits. How should our souls rise up to thee, and fix themselves in their thoughts upon thee! How should they long to return back to the fountain of their being and the Author of their glory!

Man could no sooner see, than he saw himself happy. His eyesight and his reason were both perfect at once; and the objects of both tended to his complete felicity. When he first opened his eyes he saw heaven above him, earth under him, the creatures about him: he knew what all these meant, as if he had been long acquainted with them all. He saw the heavens glorious, but far off: his Maker thought it proper to prepare him an earthly Paradise. It was fit his body should have an image, on earth, of that heaven which should afterwards receive his soul. Had man been only formed for *contemplation*, he might have been placed in some vast desert, or on the top of some barren mountain—but the same power which gave him a heart to meditate, gave

him hands to work, and work fitted to his hands. Neither was it merely the design of the Creator that man should *live*—he willed him to be *joyful*. Pleasure is every way consistent with innocence; it cannot indeed exist without it. God loves to see his creatures happy; our lawful delight is his. They know not God who think to please him by making themselves miserable.

What rare and grateful varieties do we find in gardens planted by the hands of men! But when He who made the matter, undertakes the *fashion*, how must it be beyond our capacity excellent! No herb, no flower, no tree was wanting which might be for ornament or use. And yet, if God had not there conversed with man, his abundance had never made him blessed.

Here his pleasure was his task. Paradise served not only to feed his senses, but to exercise his hands. Did happiness consist in doing nothing, man, in his state of innocence, had been unemployed. But man is no sooner made, than his Creator gives him his appointed work: he must labor, because he was happy—he was happy, in that he labored. The more cheerfully we discharge the duties of our several callings, the more nearly do we approach to our paradise.

Neither did these trees afford him only action for his hands, but instruction to his heart. All other trees in the garden had a natural use—two a spiritual. The tree of knowledge and the tree of life were designed to nourish the soul by a lively representation of that living Tree, whose fruit is eternal life, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

O infinite mercy! Man saw his Savior before him, ere he had need of a Savior. He saw in whom he should obtain a heavenly life, ere he had lost the earthly. And though after he had tasted of the tree of knowledge, he might not taste of the tree of life, yet then did he reap most benefit from the *invisible* tree of

life when he was most restrained from the visible. Of this food, O Savior, thou hast called me to partake. Lo, I eat, and in spite of Adam's disobedience, I live for ever.

How divine a thing is knowledge, whereof even innocence itself was ambitious! But it would not content our first parent to know God and his creatures: his curiosity affected to know what God never made—evil of sin, and evil of death. *We* know evil well enough, and smart with knowing it. How dearly hath this lesson taught us, that in some cases our happiness consists in being ignorant! How many thousand souls miscarry with the presumptuous affectation of forbidden knowledge! O God, thou hast revealed to us as much as we can know—enough to make us happy. Without thee wisdom is folly, and learning, ignorance.

Such was the abode of unfallen man, yet even there was seen the tempter. What marvel is it, if our depravity find him present with us, when our holy parents found him in their paradise! No sooner is he entered, than he commenceth his attack: elsewhere he knew there was no danger; behold him at the tree forbidden! Lord, (let me beg it without presumption,) make thou me wiser than Adam. Even thine image, which he bore, preserved him not in obedience, by reason of his own infirmity. When he had made a covenant with death, and with hell an agreement, it was just for thee to dismiss him from his glorious abode. Why shouldst thou feed a rebel at thine own board?

And yet we transgress daily, and thou dost not shut heaven against us: how is it that we find more mercy than our forefather? His fancied strength deserved severity—our weakness finds pity. That God, whose face he fled in the garden, now makes him with shame fly out of the garden—those angels that should have kept him, now keep the gates of paradise against him. It is

not so easy to recover happiness as to keep it, or to lose it.

The same cause which drove man from paradise, has since withdrawn paradise from the world. That fiery sword did not defend it against those waters wherewith the sins of men drowned the glory of the world; neither now do I seek where that paradise was which we lost—I know where that paradise *is* which we must study to seek and hope to find. As man was the image of God, so was that earthly paradise an image of heaven—both the *images* are defaced—both the first patterns are eternal. Adam was the first—he remained not—in the second is that Second Adam, which said, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” There was that chosen Vessel, who heard and saw what could not be expressed—since as much as the third heaven exceeds the richest earth, so doth that paradise, to which we aspire, exceed that which we have lost. Thou, O God, shalt show us the path of life—in thy presence is fulness of joy—at thy right hand is pleasure for evermore.



### 3.—CAIN AND ABEL.

Look now, O my soul, upon the two first brethren, and wonder at their contrary dispositions. If the privileges of mere nature had been of any value, the first-born child had not been desperately wicked. Behold in Abel a saint, in Cain a murderer!

Doubtless their education was holy. For Adam, though in paradise he transgressed the command of God, was devout and faithful in his exile. His sin and fall had made him circumspect: and since he saw that

his act had bereaved his children of those blessings that were once in store for them, he would surely labor, by all holy endeavors, to atone for what had passed, that so his care might make amends for his trespass. Alas, who would then think that the children of this common parent should not be examples of mutual love? If but two brothers be left alive of many, we think that the love of all the rest should survive in them—yet behold here are but two brothers in a world, and one is the assassin of the other! That spirit which caused enmity between man and God, now sets enmity between man and man. All quarrels, all uncharitableness must flow from one only source. If we entertain wrath we give place to the devil. Certainly so deadly an act must needs be deeply grounded.

What then was the occasion of this capital malice? Abel's sacrifice meets with acceptance. What was this to Cain? Cain's oblation is rejected. Could Abel be in fault on this account? O envy, the corrosive of all evil minds, and the root of all atrocious actions! It should have been Cain's joy to see his brother accepted—it should have been his sorrow to see that he had deserved rejection: his brother's example should have animated and directed him in the same path of godliness. Could Abel *prevent* the fire of God from descending on his brother's sacrifice? Or should he be insensible of the mercy shown to himself, and displease his Maker to satisfy a graceless brother? Was Cain removed further from a blessing because Abel obtained mercy, and found favor from above?

How proud and how foolish is malice, which grows thus frantic and desperate for no cause, but that God is just and his servant holy! Religion, from the introduction of sin amongst mankind, hath ever been the occasion of danger to the children of light. O Lord, let me, in indifferent actions, be careful to avoid giving of-



fence—but while I walk in the way of thy commandments, and receive the gracious manifestations of thy favor, I care not if my obedience provoke the indignation of thine enemies.

Seldom hath there existed a nature so perfect as to be altogether free from envy. Many, who, perhaps, do not suspect themselves, would, upon examination, find that they had some traces of Cain's disposition in their own. Too often do we hate that goodness in those around us which we neglect in ourselves.

There was never envy that was not bloody—for it will devour our own heart, if it reach not that of another. If it be not restrained by the over-ruling arm of heaven, it will surely be defiled with blood—often in act—always in disposition. And that God, who in good accepts the will for the deed, condemns the will for the deed in evil. If there be an evil heart, there will be an evil eye : and if both these, an evil hand.

How early did martyrdom come into the world ! The first man that died, died for religion.

But who dares measure God's love by outward events, when he sees the wicked Cain stand over the bleeding Abel ? The sacrifice of that holy man was first accepted, and now himself was sacrificed. Death was denounced to man as a curse, yet behold it is first inflicted on the innocent. How soon is this curse turned into a benediction ! I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, " Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." If death had been finally evil, and life good, then would Cain have been cut off, and Abel would have survived. Now, since we see that it begins with him whom God loveth, we cry out with confidence, " O Death, where is thy sting ?"

Abel says nothing—his blood cries. Every drop of guiltless blood hath a tongue ; and is not only vocal but importunate. How loud then was the sound which went

up to heaven when that righteous blood was shed, the blood of him who was both the Priest and the Sacrifice—Him, who *accepted* it in his divine nature, while he *offered* it in his human! The Spirit which witnessed both, declares that it spake better things than the blood of Abel. Abel's blood called for revenge—thine, O Savior, for mercy. Abel's blood pleaded his own innocence—thine, the satisfaction made for all who should believe. Abel's blood procured Cain's punishment—thine delivered all repentant souls from the wrath of God and the judgment which would have ensued. Better things indeed than the blood of Abel! It is *good* that God should be avenged on sinners. It is *better*, that through Thy mercy he should spare the penitent.

No sooner doth Abel's blood speak to God, than God speaks to Cain. There is no wicked man to whom God speaks not—if not to his ear, yet to his heart. The words of the Almighty, on this occasion, are not an accusation, but an inquiry—yet such an inquiry as would infer an accusation. God would have a sinner accuse himself—it is the first step towards repentance and pardon. He hath therefore placed his awful vicegerent in the breast of man. But while divine grace seeks to produce this ingenuous confession, unregenerate nature abhors it. Cain answers with stubborn insolence. The very name of Abel wounds him no less than his hand had wounded Abel. Consciences that are without remorse are not without horror—wickedness makes them either penitent or desperate. The homicide dares to be angry with God, as first for accepting his brother's oblation, so now for listening to his blood!

Lo, he presumes to answer God with a question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"—when he should have said—"Am I not my brother's murderer?" He scorns to *keep* him whom he feared not to *destroy*. Good duties are base and troublesome to wicked minds, while tney

shrink not from the most abandoned villany. Yet this miscreant, who had neither grace to *avoid* his sin, nor to *confess* it, when he is convicted, and has received his just sentence, is loud and importunate in his cries and exclamations. He, who regards not the act of sin, shall be made to feel the smart of his punishment. In the regions of sorrow, the enemies of God are weary of their torments, but in vain. Cain, who would not keep his brother, is cast out from the protection of God—Cain, who feared not to kill his brother, fears death at the hand of every man. The troubled conscience projects fearful things, and sin makes even cruel men cowardly. God condemns the criminal, not to die, but to live. He was anxious for life—it is granted him: but it is granted as a curse. How often doth God hear sinners in anger! He shall live, banished from God, carrying his hell in his bosom, and the brand of Divine vengeance in his forehead. God rejects him—the earth refuses to prosper him—men abhor him—he now wishes for the death which once he feared, but the world does not afford another murderer. How bitter, how endless are the consequences of sin! Now Cain finds that he killed *himself* rather than his brother. We should never offend, if we foresaw in what light our offence would hereafter appear even to ourselves. The issue of sin would be found a thousand times more horrible than the act is pleasant.

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#### 4.—NOAH.

What a deluge of sin preceded the flood of waters! The unequal yoke with infidels caused this superfluity of naughtiness. The sons of God beheld the daughters

of men, that they were fair. Religious husbands lost their piety, and gained a rebellious and monstrous progeny.

That which was the first occasion of sin, was the occasion of the *increase* of sin. No man hath his soul in safety who hath not made a covenant with his eyes. Like their first parents, these deluded patriarchs beheld that which God had forbidden—they saw—they lusted—they transgressed—and they died.

The Divine justice might have punished them without previous notice—yet, to approve his mercies even to the wicked, God gives them a hundred and twenty years' space for repentance. How loth is the Lord to strike, who threatens so long! He who delights in revenge, *surprises* his adversary—he who gives long warnings, seeks even for the guilty a way to escape. It is the obduracy of man alone which occasions his suffering.

Neither doth God in this instance give time only; he sends a faithful teacher. Happy are the flock whose pastors are righteous. Noah's hand taught as well as his tongue. His business, in building the ark, was a real sermon to the world—while the work itself proclaimed mercy and life to the believer, and to the rebellious, destruction.

Methinks I see the gigantic sons of Lamech coming to Noah and asking him what he means by that strange work?—whether he designs to sail upon the dry land? To whom, when he declares God's purpose and his own, they depart in scorn, wagging their heads and saying, "He is beside himself—too much *holiness* hath made him mad." But all their impious mockeries deprive not Noah of his faith—he preaches, and builds, and finishes. It is probable that other hands besides his own and those of his family assisted him in his labors—that many contributed to *build* the ark, who were not preserved in the ark. Our outward works cannot save us without our

faith. We may procure deliverance to others, and yet be miserable ourselves.

What a wonder of mercy is this that we here behold?—a single family called out of a world—a few grains of corn selected from so vast a quantity of chaff! An unholy descendant of Noah is kept alive for his father's sake—not one righteous man perished in the general destruction. For these few the earth was still preserved under the waves. Were it not for the godly, fire would even now consume that world which could not be purified by water.

The most savage of all creatures (by an instinct of God) come to seek the ark—not a *man* is seen to approach. Reason once depraved is worse than brutishness. How gently do these tyrants of the desert offer and submit themselves to the patriarch, renewing that allegiance to the repairer of the world, which before his transgression they paid to its first lord! The lions fawn upon Noah and Daniel. If the Creator will preserve, the creature hath no power to destroy.

The day is come—all the guests are entered—the ark is shut—the windows of heaven are open—and the fountains of the great deep broken up. Now these scoffers, when they see the predictions of Noah about to be fulfilled, approach in haste and importunately crave admittance. But as they formally rejected God, so they are justly rejected by him in return. Before vengeance begins, repentance is seasonable—till judgment be gone out, we do not cry too late. While the Gospel solicits us, the doors of the ark are open. If we neglect the time of grace, we shall learn by sad experience that God will fearfully punish the obdurate. When from the tops of the mountains they contemplate their approaching dissolution with paleness and horror, they see the ark floating upon the waters, and behold with envy that which they formerly beheld with scorn.

In vain doth he fly, whom God pursues. There is no way to avoid his judgments, unless we betake ourselves to his mercy by repentance. The faith of the righteous was once derided—now his success demonstrates the hand of God. How securely doth Noah ride out this uproar of heaven, earth, and waters! He hears the pouring down of the rain above his head—the shrieks of men, the roaring of beasts around him—the raging of the waves beneath him. He sees the miserable end of the unbelievers; and in the mean time himself neither feels nor fears evil. He knows that God, who created the waters, will direct him—that God, who had shut him in, will preserve him. How happy a thing is faith! What a quiet safety, what a heavenly peace doth it work in the soul, in the midst of all the inundations of evil!

At length the Almighty decreed that a renovation of all things should succeed this destruction. After forty days the heaven clears up—after a hundred and fifty, the waters sink down. God is soon weary of punishing—he is never weary of blessing. Now doth Noah send out the raven and the dove. The raven flies away, and returns no more. The carnal mind quits the church of God and embraces the present world; scorning to be restrained within the limits of christian obedience. The dove, like a true citizen of the ark, returns, and by her olive-leaf brings welcome news of the abatement of the waters. How worthy are those ambassadors to be received with joy, who, with innocence in their lives, bring glad tidings of peace and salvation in their mouths!

Noah believes and rejoices, yet still he waits seven days more ere he will despatch again his winged messenger, and two months ere he will forsake the ark: nor would he even then have quitted it, had not the God who commanded him to enter, commanded him likewise to depart. Happy is that man who in all

things, neglecting the counsels of flesh and blood, depends upon the direction of Omnipotence.

No sooner is Noah come out of the ark than he builds an altar—not a house for himself, but an altar to the Lord. Delayed gratitude is not worthy of acceptance. Behold this fire of Noah's sacrifice ascends up to those heavens from whence the waters fell, and a glorious rainbow appears there, for his security and that of his descendants; a pledge of the everlasting covenant between heaven and earth. No incense can be so sweet in the presence of God as the holy obedience of the faithful. Here then was there a new and second rest. First, God rested from *making* the world, now from *destroying* it. We cease not to offend, but he forbears again to punish us by a general overthrow. His word was enough; but he adds a token which may speak the truth of his promise to the very eyes of men. Nor is this more evident in the natural than in the spiritual world. His blessed sacraments are the symbols of his heavenly covenant to the soul. All the signs of his institution are proper and significant.

But who would look, after all this, to find righteous Noah, the father of the new world, drunken in his tent? Alas, what are we men without assistance from God! While he upholds us no temptation can prevail against us; if he withdraw his support, no trial is too weak to overthrow us. He who thus suffered the king, the priest, the prophet of the world to transgress, knows how to make even the errors of his holy ones tend to the advantage of his church. If we had not such examples of human frailty before us, how often should we be tempted to despair at the thought of our manifold infirmities!

What shall we think of that vice which robs a man of himself, and leaves a beast in his room? Ham beholds, and laughs at the humiliation of his parent and preserver. Better had that ungracious son perished in

the waters, than that he should have lived to receive his father's curse. The modest sorrow of his brethren, which drew on them a blessing, is *their* praise and our example. The sins of those we love and honor we must hear of with indignation—fearfully and unwillingly believe—acknowledge with grief and shame—hide with honest excuses—and bury in silence.

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### 5.—ABRAHAM.

How soon are men and sins multiplied! While they see before them the fearful monuments of their ancestors' ruin, how quickly have they forgotten a flood! It was a proud word, "Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven." Most shameful arrogance—most ignorant presumption in man, who is a worm—in the son of man, who is a worm! God wills us to look up towards heaven with lively faith—with humble and fervent desires, not with the proud imaginations of our own achievements; but haughty and frantic ambition knows no limits, and so the Almighty directs his indignation against it.

Lo! his divine power arrests them in the midst of their course; by dividing their tongues he frustrates their work, and mocks the impiety of the workmen. How easily can he control or bring to nothing the greatest projects of men! Wicked acts, which begin in vain-glory, do for the most part terminate in shame. Afterwards there was a time when what was here effected as a *punishment*, took place, by the inspiration of God, for a *blessing* to the church, that the sound of the glorious Gospel might be heard amidst the people, the nations and the languages. But alas! to this day in our spiritual



Sion the building doth not advance, because our tongues are divided. Happy would it be for the church of God if *there* we all spake but one language. While we live in discord we can build nothing but confusion. Difference of tongues caused the Babel of these sinners to cease, but it promotes the height of ours.

In the land whose inhabitants thus rebelled against a God of justice and mercy the holy patriarch Abraham is born, but he is directed to seek elsewhere for his abode.

It was fit that he who was to be the father and pattern of the faithful should be thoroughly tried. No son of Abraham must shrink from difficulties, or expect to escape temptations, when he sees that bosom on which hereafter he desires to repose assaulted by such innumerable trials. Abraham must leave his country and kindred, and dwell among strangers. The earth is the Lord's, and all places are alike to the wise and faithful. If Chaldea had not been grossly idolatrous Abraham had not quitted it, but no bond must tie us to the danger of infection.

Yet whither must he go? to a place he knew not—to men that knew not him. It is comfort enough to a good man, wheresoever he is, that he is acquainted with God: we cannot be out of the way while we follow his holy calling. Never did any man lose by his obedience to the Most High. Because Abraham yielded, God gives him the inheritance of Canaan; and the faith which thus takes possession, equals that which first led him to quit his native country. Behold, Abraham takes possession for that progeny which he had not—which in nature it was not probable he should have. He takes possession of that land whereof himself should never have one foot; wherein his descendants should not be settled till almost five hundred years after. The power of faith can anticipate time, and make future things present. If we are the true sons of Abraham, we are already, while we

sojourn here on earth, possessors of our land of promise ; while we *seek* our country we *have* it.

Canaan doth not afford him bread, which yet must flow with milk and honey to his posterity. Sense must still yield to faith. He must depart into the land of Egypt, and there seek the relief which elsewhere he may not find. Thrice hath Egypt preserved the church of God—in Abraham, in Jacob, in Christ. The Almighty often makes use of the world for the benefit of his children ; and even the wicked in many instances effect his good purpose, while themselves are intending only evil.

The famine is past ; the patriarch returns, and with him the wife of his bosom, and Lot, the companion of his exile ; while Canaan, as if it would atone for its late scarcity, now brings forth by handfuls, even to these strangers. Before they grew rich they dwelt together ; now their wealth separates them ; their society was a greater benefit than their riches. How many are grievous sufferers by that which the world holds dearest !

It was the duty of Lot to yield to the brother of his father, not to contend and stipulate. Who would not think Abraham the younger and Lot the elder ? It is no disparagement to the greatest persons to commence a treaty of peace. Better does it become every servant of God to win with love than to sway with power. Abraham resigns his pre-eminence—Lot takes it. And behold, Lot is crossed in that he chose ; Abraham is blessed in that which was left him. God will not fail to reward him who meekly resigns his right in the desire of peace.

Lot sees the fertile plains watered by Jordan—the richness of the soil—the benefit of the rivers—the situation of the cities ; and without inquiring further, he takes up his abode in Sodom. Twice did he pay dear for his rashness. He departed peaceably from his nearest friend ; he finds war with strangers ; he is deprived

of his liberty and substance by powerful enemies. Now must Abraham rescue him by whom he had been forsaken. That wealth which was the cause of his former quarrels is made a prey to merciless heathens; that place which his eye covetously chose endangers his life and his possessions. Christians, while they have sought for gain, have too frequently lost themselves.

Yet this ill success hath not induced Lot to depart from that wicked region which, if it had been taught repentance by the sword, would have escaped the fire. Even this visitation hath not made ten good men in those five cities. Only Lot vexed his righteous soul at their wickedness. He vexed *his own* soul, for he staid there with his own consent; but because he was vexed he is delivered—he is rescued from the judgments of God—he becomes an host to angels. The houses of holy men are full of these heavenly spirits, whom they know not; they pitch *their* tents in *ours*, visit us when we see not, and when we feel not protect us.

Wickedness hath but a time; its punishment inevitably, however slowly, approaches. Short and dangerous was the residue of that night in which the patriarch received his heavenly guests. Yet still he goes forth to seek his sons-in-law. No good man wishes to be happy alone; faith makes us charitable at the hazard of our own safety. He warns them like a prophet, and advises them like a father, but in vain; he seems to them as one that mocked, and they do more than *seem* to mock him in return. Thus, to carnal minds preaching is foolish, devotion useless, the prophets madmen, Paul a vain babbler. He that believeth not is condemned already.

O the bounty of God, which extends not to *us* only, but *ours*! He preserves Lot for Abraham's sake, and even the city Zoar for Lot's sake. Were it not that the children of God are intermixed with the world, that world could not stand; the wicked owe their lives to

those few good men, whom they hate and persecute. Now the sun rises on Zoar, and fire falls down on Sodom. Abraham stands upon the hill and sees the cities burning. His faith is confirmed, while his heart is rent with pity for those in whose behalf he had pleaded with his God.

The angel, who came down from heaven in wrath to visit Sodom, brought to Abraham a message of peace, and announced the near approach of the promised seed. The holy man hears the tidings with joy. Sarah mistrusts, and fears, and doubts, and yet hides her diffidence; till, reprov'd for her infidelity by Him who is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, she is at length convinced of his omnipotence.

Abraham believeth God, and it is accounted to him for righteousness. It is enough for him that God hath said it. He sees not the means, he sees the promise. He knows that his posterity shall be as the stars of heaven, though as yet he has no child. Faith is ever recompens'd with blessings. Isaac is born to Sarah and to Abraham.



## 6.—IS A A C.

But these are in comparison easy tasks of faith—all ages have stood amazed at the next, not knowing whether they should more wonder at God's command or the obedience of his servant. Many years that good patriarch waited for his son. Now he hath joyfully received him, and with him the gracious promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Behold, the son of his age, the son of his love, the son of his expectation must die by the hand of this wretched father. "Take

thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering."

Never was any gold tried in so fierce a fire. But God knew that he spake to an Abraham; and Abraham knew that he was commanded by a God. Faith had taught him not to argue, but obey. He is sure that what God commands is good—that what he promises is infallible—and therefore he is careless of the *means*, and trusts to the *end*. We hear him not exclaiming, "What! doth the God of mercies delight in blood? Can murder become piety? Can I not be faithful unless I am unnatural? Why did I wait so long for my son? Why didst thou give him me? Why is he so dutiful, so dear, so hopeful? Why didst thou promise me a blessing in him? When Isaac is gone, where is my blessing? O God, if thy commands and purposes be capable of alteration, let thy first word stand—rescind this dreadful sentence!"

These would have been the thoughts of an unstable heart. The good patriarch rises early and prepares himself for his sad journey. And now he must travel three whole days to the place appointed; and still must Isaac be in his eye, whom all this while in his imagination he sees expiring. There is nothing so miserable as to dwell under the expectation of a great evil. Inevitable misfortune is mitigated by speed and aggravated by delay. All this time had Abraham leisure to return. Now when they are come in sight of the chosen mountain the attendants are dismissed. What a devotion is this, that will abide no witnesses? Alas, what stranger could have endured to see the father carry the knife and fire, instruments of that death which he had rather suffer than inflict? to see the son carrying that load on which he was so soon to be extended as a victim?

But what must be the strength of Abraham's faith,

that he could endure the question of his dear, his innocent, his religious child? "My father, behold the fire and the wood—but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Did not that one word, "My father," inflict on the patriarch a death far more cruel than he could possibly inflict on his son? Yet still the pious parent conceals, persists, and where he means not, prophesies. "My son, God himself shall provide a lamb for the burnt-offering."

Reluctantly do the heavy tidings come forth—it was torment to Abraham to say what he must do. He knows his own faith, he knows not the constancy of his son. But now, when Isaac hath assisted in building the altar on which he must be offered, he hears the strange command of God, the final will of his father. "My son, thou art the lamb which God hath provided for this burnt-offering. If my blood would have excused thee, how many thousand times had I rather give thee mine own life than take thine! Alas, I am full of days, and for a long season have only lived in thee. Thou mightst have preserved the life of thy father, have comforted his death, have closed his eyes—but the God of us both has chosen thee. He that gave thee to me miraculously, bids me, by an unusual method, return thee to himself. It is needless to tell thee that I sacrifice all my worldly joys, yea, and myself in thee. But God must be obeyed; neither art thou too dear for him that calls thee. Come then, my son, restore the life which God hath given thee by me—offer thyself willingly on this altar—send up thy soul cheerfully to thy glory—and know, that God loves thee above others, since he requires thee alone to be consecrated in sacrifice to himself!"

Who cannot imagine with what perplexed and mingled passions, with what changes of countenance, what doubts, what fears, what amazement, the youth received this sudden message from the mouth of his father?

But when he had composed his thoughts, and considered that the author was God, the actor Abraham, the act a sacrifice, he approves himself no degenerate child of such a parent. Now he encourages the trembling hand of his father—offers his hands and feet to the cords, his bosom to the knife, his body to the altar. O holy emulation of faith! O blessed agreement of the sacrificer and the oblation! Abraham no longer delays the fatal act of obedience—he binds those dear hands, he lays his sacrifice on the wood.

And now having given him a last embrace, not without mutual tears, he lifts up his hand to inflict the stroke of death at once. Now the stay of Abraham, the promised seed, the hope of the Church, the beloved of God, lies prepared to bleed under the hand of a father.

What heart would be unmoved at such a spectacle as the patriarch and his Isaac at this moment afforded! What heathen, however barbarous, who had been now on the hill of Moriah, and had beheld the weapon of a parent uplifted against such a son, would not have been overwhelmed with horror and amazement? Yet he whom it most nearly concerned remains unshaken. In his pious soul faith and patience have their perfect work. He contemns all fears—he overlooks all impossibilities. His heart tells him, that the same power, which by miracle gave him his son, by miracle could raise him again from the ashes of his sacrifice. Thus fortified, thus elevated above nature itself, he prepares for the last dreadful act, when suddenly the angel of the Lord stays his arm—forbids him—commends him!

The voice of God was never so welcome, never so seasonable as now. It was the *trial* he intended, not the *fact*. Isaac is sacrificed, and is yet alive—and now the joy and rapture of these saints of God make amends to them for all the sorrows which they had sustained. The commands of God are often harsh in the beginning,

but in the conclusion always full of comfort. True spiritual consolation is frequently delayed. God defers it on purpose, that our trials may be perfect, our deliverance welcome, our recompense glorious. Isaac had never been so precious to his father, if he had not been recovered from death—if he had not been as wonderfully restored as given. Abraham had never been blessed in his posterity, if he had not neglected Isaac for God.

The only way to find comfort in any earthly thing is to surrender it into the hands of the Almighty, in pious resignation.

Abraham came to sacrifice—his purpose is not frustrated. Behold, a ram stands ready for the burnt-offering, and as it were offers himself to the exchange. What mysteries are there in every act of God! Here, even here, in after ages, the only Son of God is on this mountain laid on the altar of his cross, a true sacrifice for the world—yet is he raised without any real injury, and exempted from the power of death. Here is he offered and accepted—here his death and his rising proclaim him doubly a Savior. The patriarch Abraham saw this glorious day with the eye of faith—he saw it, and was glad.

Whatsoever is dearest to us is our Isaac—happy are we if we can offer it to God. They shall never rest with Abraham who cannot sacrifice with Abraham.



## 7.—J A C O B .

Of all the patriarchs none lived so privately or so peaceably as Isaac. Distinguished for his filial piety and conjugal affection, faithful to his God, dutiful to his parents, a chaste observer of nuptial fidelity, he



passed his days in the contemplation and the tranquillity that he so loved.

But the life of *Jacob* was busy and troublesome ; none of the patriarchal race saw such evil days as he from whom the militant Israel of God hath taken its name.

There is nothing but conflict to be expected where grace is put in competition with nature.

Esau hath the right of primogeniture, Jacob that of promise ; yet to this he adds that of purchase too. The careless, unbelieving Esau barter for a poor consideration what in fact was not rightfully his own—what was now his brother's by every law divine and human. Never, except the forbidden fruit, was food so dearly purchased as this repast of Esau !

But what hath Jacob gained, if the fondness of Isaac for his first-born shall countervail both the purchase and the promise ? Blinded by age and by affection, Isaac prepares to bestow on Esau that blessing which belonged only to the birthright he had assigned to his brother, and on which depended the precious privilege of being ancestor to the Messiah. The dearest of God's saints have sometimes been overcome by too great tenderness of heart. Isaac knew the oracle of God that the elder of his sons should serve the younger. He (no doubt) knew that profane contempt wherewith Esau had rejected the privileges of his birth. He saw him forming impious alliances with heathens—and yet he will consider nothing but his own unjust partiality. How gracious is God, who, when we would sin, doth often interpose his providence, and so orders our actions, that we do, not what we *would*, but what we *ought* !

Lo, the affections of the parents are divided that the promise may be fulfilled. Isaac would unjustly bestow on Esau that which was Jacob's ; Rebecca, with equal injustice, teaches Jacob to personate Esau. The mother

shall rather defeat the son and beguile the father, than the father shall beguile the chosen son of his blessing. Her desire was good; the means she used to effect it were unlawful. God often accomplishes his purpose by means of our infirmity; yet neither is our weakness thereby justified, nor his unerring justice impeached.

Here was nothing but illusion. The person, the name, the food, the answer, all counterfeit—yet behold a true blessing! Jacob fears the failure of his stratagem, the disappointment of his hopes, the curse of his father. Rebecca, presuming on the oracle of God and the unsuspecting temper of her husband, dares be surety for the danger, counsels her son in his procedure, assists him in its progress, seeks to obviate every difficulty which may arise, and only regrets that while she invests Jacob with the *garment* of Esau, she cannot at the same time give him the *voice*. But this is past her remedy. Her son must name himself Esau in the accent of Jacob. No doubt, if Isaac by any of his senses had discerned the fraud, she herself would have stood forth, would have taken on her own head all the blame, would have urged the known will of God concerning the servitude of Esau and the dominion of Jacob, which age and partiality had blotted out from the memory of their father.

He who is good himself is unwilling to believe evil of another; and will rather distrust his own senses than the fidelity of those he loves. Yet to deceive the ear of his father, Jacob must second his dissimulation with falsehood. O Jacob, I love thy blessing, but I hate thy method of obtaining it. I would not venture thy fraud to obtain a benediction from the holiest of men; for God who pardoned thy weakness would punish my wilful transgression.

Isaac believes, and blesses his younger son in the garments of the elder; and Jacob is no sooner gone away

with joy, than Esau comes in with presumptuous expectation. Jacob had obtained that by wrong which was by right his own. Esau, not regarding his voluntary abdication of his birthright, dares yet hope for the privilege he had wantonly cast away from him.

But the hopes of the wicked fail them when they are at the highest, and Esau, who in his father's blessing sought only present benefit, meets with nothing but a repulse. Lo, Isaac now trembles, and Esau weeps. Who would trust tears when we see them fall from such graceless eyes?

Isaac trembles, on the conviction of his conscience. His heart now told him that he should not have pursued the blessing where he did, and that it was due to him who had obtained it. Hence he durst not reverse what he had done by the will of God and not his own.

It was a good word, "Bless me also, O my father!" Every miscreant can wish himself well. No man would be miserable if it were enough to *desire* happiness. But the tears of Esau were false and unholy! they were the tears of rage, of envy, of carnal desire; they proceeded from that worldly sorrow which causeth death. He did not see that God was just in all that had befallen him; he knew himself profane, and yet he claims a blessing.

And now, like a second Cain, he resolves to kill his brother because that brother was more worthy. He longs for the death of Isaac, and meditates that of Jacob; who, to escape his present indignation, flies from the cruel Esau to the cruel Laban. With a staff he goes over Jordan, alone, doubtful and comfortless. In the way the earth is his bed and a stone his pillow; yet even then his heart is full of joy; he beholds a vision of angels; he hears his father's blessing echoed to him from heaven. God is most present with us in our greatest dejection, and loves to give comfort to those who are forsaken of their hopes.

Jacob travels far, and meets with little friendship at the end of his journey. No doubt, when Laban heard of his approach he looked for the camels and attendants which summoned Rebecca from her native country! he supposed that the *son* of Isaac would not come with less grandeur than the *servant* of Abraham. Now, when he sees him alone and unattended, he beholds in him not a kinsman but a slave.

Lo, he serves seven years for his Rachel, and at the end is beguiled by the subtlety of Laban, and compelled to be the unwilling husband of Leah. In the substitution of the elder daughter for the younger he could not but remember his own past treachery. At a moment when we think not, God often repays us our sins by the sins of others. Other seven years must he serve for Rachel. What miseries will not love overcome? If Jacob was willingly consumed in the day by the heat, and in the night by the frost, to become the son-in-law of Laban, O what should we refuse to become the sons of God?

But while Laban only considers his own advantage, God provides for his faithful servant—whose wealth (after twenty years) renders him an object of envy to the proud sons of a cruel father. Jacob is constrained to flee as from an enemy; Laban, as an enemy, pursues him—meanwhile an army of men are conducted against him by Esau, with equally hostile intentions. But he who can wrestle earnestly with God is secure from the harms of men. Laban *leaves* Jacob, and Esau *meets* him with a kiss. Who shall need to fear that is in league with God? When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Yet how many are the troubles of the righteous! Rachel, the comfort of his life, dieth. His children, the staff of his age, wound his soul to the death. Simeon and Levi are murderous—Reuben and Judah incestuous

—Dinah is ravished—Joseph is lost—Simeon is imprisoned—Benjamin, the right hand of his father, is endangered—and Jacob is driven by famine in his old age to die amongst the Egyptians, a people who held it abomination to eat with him. What son of Israel can hope for good days, when he hears that his father's were so evil? It is enough for us, if when we are dead we can rest with him in the land of promise. If the Angel of the covenant once bless us, no pain, no sorrow can make us miserable. Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.



### 8.—J O S E P H .

Suffering is ever the way to glory. If we are dear to our heavenly Father we are hated by our carnal brethren. Joseph is not a clearer type of Christ, than of every christian.

How unsearchable are the ways of God! How do they transcend all human investigation! Had it not been for Joseph's dreams, he had not been sold; had he not been sold, he had not been exalted. Little did Joseph think, when he went to seek his brethren, that he should never more return to his father's house; little did his brethren think, when they sold him naked to the Ishmaelites, that they should see him exalted to princely dignity in Egypt.

While Joseph inquires of his brethren's health they are plotting his destruction. He looked for kinsmen and friends, and beheld murderers! Each one strives who shall lay the first hand on the many-colored pledge of a

father's fondness. They strip him naked, cast him alive into his grave, and, in pretence of forbearance, resolve to aggravate his misery by a death of protracted anguish.

All this while Joseph wanted neither words nor tears—the passionate suppliant entreated them, by the dear name of their brotherhood, by their adoration of one common God, for their father's sake, for their own soul's sake, not to sin against his blood. But envy hath shut out mercy, and made them forget themselves, not only to be brethren, but men. While the noise of his lamentation is in their ears, they sit down to eat bread, without one sensation of remorse at their having condemned the innocent darling of their father to perish with hunger.

And now, while he hath nothing in prospect but present death, behold it exchanged for bondage. God will ever raise up some secret favorers to his children, even among their bitterest enemies. At the instigation of Judah, a company of Ishmaelites passing by, purchase a treasure far more precious than all their balm and myrrh. From the pit where he lay naked and languishing they receive into their hands the lord of Egypt, the delight and ornament of the world.

He who is mourned for in Canaan as dead, prospers in Egypt in the house of Potiphar, and instead of a slave is made a ruler—but lo, again his obedience to God and unshaken adherence to his duty make him the victim of malice and revenge. Disappointed lust, hatred burning furiously in the heart of a woman, procure him an unjust and cruel imprisonment. The patriarch submits in silence—he knows that God will find a time to clear his innocence, to reward his chaste fidelity.

No sooner is Joseph a prisoner than he is a *guardian* of the prisoners. Trust and honor accompany him wheresoever he is. In his father's house, in Potiphar's, in the prison, in the palace, still hath he both favor and rule.

After two years of Joseph's patience, God calls him to more distinguished honor—sends a dream to Pharaoh—imparts the interpretation to Joseph. Lo, from a miserable prisoner the youth is made ruler of Egypt! One hour hath changed his fetters into a chain of gold, and the captive of Potiphar is lord over his ancient master. Humility goes before honor—sorrow and suffering are the best instructors to those who are called to dignity. How well are the children of God repaid for their patience! Never doth he neglect them; least of all in the day of their afflictions.

Pharaoh prefers Joseph—Joseph enriches Pharaoh. If Joseph had not ruled, Egypt had been undone—now the subjects are indebted to him for life, the king for his supremacy—the bounty of God made his servant able to *give* more than he received.

No piety can exempt us from the common visitations of God. The holy Jacob is afflicted by the famine which desolates the land of his pilgrimage. No man can tell by the outward event, which is the patriarch and which the Canaanite. His ten sons must now leave their flocks and go down into Egypt. They must humbly bow the knee to him who was once the object of their scornful cruelty. His habit, his language, his dignity kept Joseph from their thoughts—while nothing tends to prevent his immediate recollection of those whom he has more reason to view as enemies than as brethren.

Now does he behold the accomplishment of his ancient dreams—now thinks he fit to hide his love from them who had shown him so much hatred. He speaks roughly—rejects their persuasions—calls them spies—puts them all in hold—and one of them in bonds. The mind must not always be judged by the outward actions. God's countenance is often severe to those he best loveth. What song could be so delightful to the patriarch as to hear his brethren in bitter remorse condemn them—

selves for their former cruelty, before him who was their witness and judge? His heart is melted—he pities them with tears—he weeps for joy to see their repentance.

Yet is Simeon left in fetters, and the rest go back with their corn and with their money to their father. Jacob was unused to perfect happiness. They who bring him necessary food, bring him sad tidings of the detention of one son, the danger of another. While they prevent his dying with hunger, they pierce his heart with new sorrows.

The painful separation is for a while protracted: but at length his Benjamin must depart. No plea is so importunate as that of famine. The brethren return to Egypt laden with double money, and with a present in their hands.

Now hath Joseph his desire—now doth he feast his eyes with the sight of that dear brother whom he borrows, as it were, for a season, that he may restore him with increase of joy. Now he welcomes them whom once he threatened, and turns their fear into wonder. But soon their fear comes back with tenfold violence. Joseph, by a feigned accusation of Benjamin, proves his brethren afresh, that he may redouble their joy should he deem them worthy of his love.

And now, when Judah tenderly reports the danger of his aged father, and the sadness of his last complaint, and his fond attachment to the son of his old age, compassion and transport will be concealed no longer—they burst forth by his voice and at his eyes. Joseph sends out his servants, that he might freely weep. He knew he could not say, "I am Joseph!" without the most impassioned vehemence.

Never any word sounded like this in the ears of the sons of Jacob. What marvel if they stood with paleness and silence before him, while the more they believed



the more they feared! "I am Joseph," implies to their consciences, "Ye are murderers! My power and this place give me all opportunities of revenge. My glory is your shame, my life your danger, your sin lives together with me." But soon the tears and gracious words of Joseph assure them of pardon and love, and change their doubts into gladness. Now they return home rich and joyful, and make themselves happy by the joy they were to afford their father.

The return of Benjamin was acceptable—but that his dead son was yet alive after so many years' lamentation, was intelligence too rapturous for belief, and endangered the life of Jacob with fulness of joy.

Yet his eyes revived his mind; and when he saw the chariots of his son he believed Joseph's life, and sought earnestly for his society. "It is enough—Joseph my son is yet alive—I will go down and see him before I die."

The height of all earthly happiness appeared in the meeting of the father and his son, endeared to each other by their mutual loss. God doth often remove our comforts for a time, that we may be more joyful in their recovery. This was the most unmixed joy the patriarch ever felt. It was reserved by heaven to illumine the evening of his days.

And if the meeting of earthly friends be so delightful, how happy shall we be in the sight of the glorious God, our heavenly Father! of that blessed Redeemer, whom we sold to death by our sins, and who, after his noble triumph, hath all power given him in heaven and earth!

Thus did Jacob rejoice when he was to go out of the land of promise into a foreign nation for Joseph's sake; being glad to lose his country for his son. O what shall our joy be who must go out of this foreign land of our pilgrimage to the home of our glorious inherit-

ance, to that better Goshen, free from all the imperfections of this Egypt, and full of all the riches and delights of God!

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### 9.—ISRAEL IN EGYPT.

Egypt was long a place of refuge to the Israelites—now it becomes a prison: they who at first were honored as lords, are now held in contempt as slaves. It is a rare thing to find posterity heirs of ancient love; one Pharaoh advances the children of Jacob, another labors to destroy them. How should the favor of men be otherwise than themselves, variable and inconstant? There is no certainty but in the favor of God, in whom is no variableness, whose mercies descend without interruption on a thousand generations.

If the Israelites had been treacherous, if they had been disobedient, there had been some pretence for this alienation. Now their only offence is, that they prosper; that which should bring them congratulation becomes the cause of malice. There is no sight so hateful to a wicked man as the felicity of the righteous.

And what if Israel be mighty and rich? "If there be war, they may join with our adversaries." It is easy for those who seek for contention to find a plausible pretence; here were *no* wars, no adversaries, no hostile dispositions on the part of Israel; yet behold, they enslave their certain friends for fear of uncertain enemies. Wickedness is ever suspicious and cowardly, it makes men fear where no fear is—makes them flee when none pursueth. *David* saith, "I will not be afraid for ten thousand of the people who have set them-

selves against me round about." Pharaoh, "If there be war, they may join with our adversaries." Was not this fear, if it really did exist, a motive for his treating them with *kindness*? Ought he not to have shown them favor, that they might have adhered steadfastly to his cause? That a people so great, so powerful, might have drawn their swords in his behalf? Weak and base minds ever incline to the least noble part; favors are more binding than cruelties; yet the Egyptians prefer a nation of slaves to friends.

"Come on, let us work wisely." Evil men call wicked politics wisdom, and their success happiness, while themselves are the miserable dupes of sin, and of the great deceiver, who lays the plot and teaches his deluded followers to choose villany and madness instead of true wisdom and virtue.

Injustice is upheld by violence; task-masters are set over Israel; heavy burdens are laid upon them; the name of a slave is added to that of a stranger. Too probable is it, that the children of Israel had sinned during their abode among an idolatrous nation, and that He whom they had offended, now made them suffer for their sins. Had they not deserved the burden of God's anger, they would not have borne the burdens of the Egyptians.

But as God afflicted them with far different views than Pharaoh, (the one for their benefit, the other for their extinction,) so he caused the events to differ. Who would not have thought with these Egyptians that the extreme misery of Israel would have subdued and diminished them? God, who worketh according to his almighty wisdom, causes them to grow with depression, with persecution to multiply! How can his church be dispirited when the very malice of their enemies benefits them—when the goodness of their heavenly Father turns even poisons into cordials? The vine which Thou broughtest up out of Egypt, O God,

*flourished* under the pruning-knife which sought to destroy it.

And will not the Egyptians abhor their own malice when they see the prosperity of those whom they thus unjustly persecute? Alas, as the strength of Israel increased, so did the hatred of their inveterate enemies. Tyranny will try what can be done by the violence of others; women must be suborned to be murderers; the male children must be born and die at once. It is fault enough to be the son of an Israelite. Whosoever gives a loose to cruelty is easily carried into incredible extremities of guilt.

From burdens they proceed to bondage, and from bondage to blood. There is no sin more dangerous, more desperate, than that of malice; but the power of tyrants often fails of answering their will. The promoters of mischief cannot always meet with equally mischievous agents.

The fear of God teaches these women to disobey an unjust command: they well knew that human injunctions are not a sufficient excuse for atrocious acts. God spake to their hearts, "Thou shalt not kill." This voice was louder than that of Pharaoh—who, while he saw that they rebelled against his word, was prevented by Omnipotence from executing vengeance on them for refusing to comply with his impious dictates.

But what the midwives will not do the multitude shall effect—it were strange if wicked rulers should not find some instruments of violence. All the people are called upon to become executioners of a tyrant's wrath. Now doth cruelty flame up; now dares it proclaim its odious purpose. It is a miserable state where every man is enjoined to be a murderer! There can be no greater argument of a bad cause than a bloody persecution. Truth upholds herself by mildness, and is promoted by patience.

Such was their inhuman deed—what was the consequence? They who thus barbarously destroyed the children of the Israelites, by the just retribution of God, are deprived of their own children. They who caused these innocents to perish in the waters are themselves afterwards made to suffer in like manner. That law of retaliation which he does not permit his creatures to execute, himself with unerring justice can dispense. God would have us read our sins in our punishment, that we may at once repent of our transgressions and adore his righteous judgments.

In the process of time another king of Egypt rises up, but to continue, not to deviate from the policy of his predecessor. The cruelties of the oppressor, the sufferings of the oppressed are the same. When at last he received a message from heaven commanding him to dismiss the people of God, then did his rage grow frantic: he was like the vapor in a cloud, which bursts with a fearful noise because it meets with opposition. A good heart yields to the still voice of God; but his merciful commands are treated with obdurate insolence by the wicked. Pharaoh takes pleasure in the *servitude* of Israel. God calls for a *release*; and requires what he knows will give displeasure to the tyrant whom he addresses. How adverse are his precepts to unregenerate souls! It is a dangerous sign of an evil heart when God's yoke is deemed heavy

God speaks of sacrifice; Pharaoh of work. To a carnal mind nothing seems superfluous but religious duties. Christ tells us that there is one thing needful; the world insinuates that it is the only thing absolutely needless. God calls his people to devotion; Pharaoh taxes them with idleness. While the wicked cast a specious veil over their own enormities they vilify the good actions of others. The same spirit which spake in Pharaoh now calls conscience singularity, and reli-

gion hypocrisy. Every vice hath a title, and every virtue a disgrace.

Yet while *possible* tasks were imposed there was some comfort. Diligence might then preserve them from indignities. But to require what is not—cannot be accomplished, is tyranny in the extreme; it is the very madness of cruelty. They who are above others in power, must measure their commands, not by their own will, but by the ability of their inferiors. The task is not done—the task-masters are beaten—the children of Israel sigh for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage—and their cry comes up unto God.



#### 10.—MOSES BORN, AND CALLED.

Many times doth God write presages of majesty and honor, even in the faces of children. This was eminently the case with Moses. Yet when his mother beheld her lovely babe with fear and anxiety, when she looked that some fierce Egyptian would come in and snatch him from her bosom, little did she think that she held in her arms the deliverer of Israel!

For a while she conceals him in her house from these messengers of death—but when she sees that her treasure can be no longer hid, she prepares him a bark of bulrushes and commits him to the mercy of the waves, to the protecting providence of God.

Never was Moses in greater security, no not when myriads of Israelites pitched their tents around him in the wilderness, than now, when he was cast alone and feeble upon the waves—no water, no Egyptian can hurt him. Neither friend nor mother dares own him,

and lo, God provides for his safety. When we seem most neglected and forlorn in ourselves, then is He most present, most vigilant.

The daughter of Pharaoh, by an impulse from heaven, is directed to the river. The merciful offspring of a cruel father sees the ark, opens it, finds the child weeping. The persuasive oratory hath its effect; her heart is struck with compassion; and the wife of Amram is herself appointed to receive her child, both with authority and reward. The exchange of the name of a mother for that of a nurse hath gained her both her son and the care of his education, and the blessing of God gives her success.

The generous princess considers him not as a wretched outcast whom it was only necessary to keep alive—she educates him as her son, in all the learning, all the grandeur of Egypt. But no doubt his pious mother early taught him that the honors of courts and palaces were not to prevent him from taking a part in the sorrows of Israel. If we had the faith of Moses we should make his choice. Infidelity binds us to the world, and makes us prefer the momentary pleasures of sin to the everlasting recompense of reward.

He went forth and looked on the burdens of Israel. What needed Moses to have afflicted himself with the afflictions of others? He was at ease and pleasure in the court of Pharaoh. But a good heart can neither endure to be happy alone nor forbear to participate with others in their miseries. He is no true Moses who is not moved with the calamities of God's church. To see an Egyptian smite a Hebrew urged him to assert his divine commission. He supposed his brethren would have understood that God, by his hand, would deliver them. He avenged him that was oppressed; he smote the Egyptian.

Another Hebrew is stricken, but by a Hebrew; and

now, instead of a deadly blow, Moses gives the aggressor a gentle admonition; reminds both parties of their common brotherhood and of their common adversities. The spirit of discord to this hour is equally active; and christians, as if they had no foreign enemies, deal among each other every kind of destruction. While we are in the Egypt of this world all unkind contentions would easily be composed if we did not forget that we are brethren.

How bitter an answer doth Moses receive to this gentle reproof! None but the regenerate can say, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness." Next to the not deserving a rebuke is the receiving it with humility: but guilt makes a man easily provoked; malice renders him incapable of good counsel; and none are so great enemies to *justice* as those who are enemies to *peace*.

"Wilt thou kill me as thou didst the Egyptian?" Had Moses slain him unjustly, what was this to the Hebrew? Another man's sin is no excuse for ours. What matters it *who* admonishes us of our faults? Let us look into our own hearts; let us weigh the advice given. If that be good it may remedy the evil, come whence it may. Yet, behold the providence of God by means of this angry Israelite gives intimation to his faithful servant of the danger that awaited him. The intended insult preserves the life of Moses; he is aware of the wrath of Pharaoh; he flees—he escapes.

Still, wherever his footsteps lead him he is an advocate for innocence. In Egypt he delivered the oppressed Israelite; in Midian the oppressed daughters of Jethro. Charity and faithfulness accompany his path and follow him in all his ways.

Now has Moses changed the delicacies of Egypt for hunger in the fields of Midian; it is a lesson which must be learned by all God's children, to want as well



as to abound. But the act of justice he had so lately done brings with it a speedy recompense. Jethro returns it kindly by hospitable entertainment. A good disposition is ever ready to requite courtesies; we cannot do too much for a thankful man. And if a generous heathen reward Moses in so bountiful a manner for giving drink to his flock, how shall our God recompense a cup of cold water only that is given to a disciple?

Moses has now an asylum; he obtains for a wife one of those damsels he had formerly protected. Jethro finds him valiant, wise, learned, nobly educated, and joyfully gives him his daughter. Yet all this kindness cannot make him forget the afflictions of his people; while absent from them he calls himself "A stranger in a strange land." If Moses so thought of his Egyptian home where was nothing but bondage and tyranny, how should we think of that our future, our glorious home, where is nothing but joy and blessedness.

Yet was the deliverer of Israel forty years an humble shepherd; so long did the leader of God's people rest in contented obscurity, and willingly leave the world to others while he had freedom of thought and full opportunity for holy meditation. He who hath resources in himself and can hold converse with God, can find more pleasure in the desert than others can do in the palaces of kings.

While he is tending his sheep Jehovah appears to him. God addresses not the idle and inactive—when he finds us in our callings we find him in the tokens of his mercy. God was always present with Moses—but he was not *seen* till now. He is never absent from his children—sometimes he condescends to appear to the evidence of their senses. When we look on this burning bush with Moses, what a lively emblem do we see of the church which then in Egypt was suffering affliction! a church persecuted but not forsaken; cast

down but not destroyed! The same power which enlightens it preserves it, and to none but to his enemies is he a *consuming* fire.

In that appearance God meant to call Moses; but when he is come he forbids his advancing too nearly. When we meditate on the glorious truths of his Gospel we come to him; we come *too near* him when we pry into his mysterious counsels. The sun and fire forbid our immediate access; how much more that Light which no man can approach? the waves of the sea have not more need of bounds than mortal presumption.

Behold the patriarchs still live after so many years of dissolution. "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." No length of time can separate the souls of the just from their Maker. If he had said, "I am the glorious God that made heaven and earth; I dwell in light inaccessible, which the angels cannot behold; I am God the Avenger, just and terrible, repaying vengeance to mine enemies;" then would the carnal heart have trembled. But to the *upright*, God is awful in his mercies. "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayst be feared." The wicked heart regards not God but when thundering, or shaking the earth or raining fire from heaven; the good can fear him in his very sunshine. Jacob, the true ancestor of Moses, when he saw nothing but visions of love and mercy, could say, "How dreadful is this place!"

Behold the difference between our present and our future state! There the more majesty of appearance the more delight. When our sin is gone, our *fear* as well as sorrow shall be turned into joy. God appeared to Adam in his innocence with comfort; but the same form, after his fall, was insupportable. And if Moses cannot endure to look on his glory when he descends

in mercy, how shall the wicked abide his fearful presence when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth?

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## 11.—THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

That flesh and blood should receive a message from heaven is an act of condescension which passeth understanding. Yet here God sends an embassy to man, and is repulsed. Well may he ask, "What is *man*, that I should look upon him?" But for man to ask, "Who is the Lord?" is a proud and bold blasphemy. Pharaoh shall know in the event, and all the world by his means, who the Lord is whom he thus rejected.

All God's judgments stand ready, and wait but till they are called for. They need but the word to be given them. No sooner is the rod lifted up than they are gone forth into the world. All the troops of God came rushing upon his adversaries. All creatures conspire to take vengeance on the disobedient. Above them the Egyptians have thunder, lightning, hail, tempest; at one time no light at all, at another such fearful flashes as had more terror than darkness. Under them the waters are changed into blood, the earth swarms with noisome reptiles and insects. They see their fruits destroyed, their cattle smitten, themselves afflicted with grievous sickness, their children suddenly snatched away by death.

First, God begins his judgment with waters. They had defiled the river with the blood of innocents, and now it appears to them as a memorial of their guilt, a monument of their past cruelty, a presage of their future destruction.

It is hard to say whether in this plague there were more horror or annoyance—yet the rod is lifted up again, and that Nilus which they adored becomes again their tormentor. Loathsome reptiles leave their element to punish the fury of the oppressors. Yet even this wonder, as well as the preceding, the magicians are allowed to imitate. God makes use of his enemies as instruments of *vengeance*—for *himself* he reserves his acts of mercy.

Still Pharaoh is hardened and the sorcerers insolent. Behold, while this pride is at its height they are in a moment brought into confusion. The rod is lifted up—the dust receives life—lice abound every where—no distinction is made between beggars and princes: the rivals of Moses are foiled and abashed; they are compelled to exclaim, “This is the finger of God.”

The water was annoyed by the first plague, the earth by the second and third. The fourth fills the air, the winged army of an indignant God. He who gave these hornets a being, gave them their limits; they can neither sting an Israelite nor spare an Egyptian.

And now the heart of Pharaoh begins to melt. “Go, serve your God in this land—Go into the wilderness, but not far away!” Alas, how soon does he return to his rebellion! Good resolutions, in carnal hearts, are merely transient guests. Now neither the contagion of his cattle nor the pestilential boils of his people can move him. To what a height of obduracy will sin lead men, and most of all sins, infidelity! Amidst these storms Pharaoh sleeps till he is roused by the voice of God’s mighty thunders and hail mingled with fire.

Then he starts and exclaims, “God is righteous; I and my people are wicked; pray for us!” But the thunder is no sooner over than he relapses into his disobedience. Again the plague of the locusts startles him: for when he considers the fish destroyed with the

first plague, the cattle with the fifth, the corn with the seventh, the fruit and leaves with this eighth, and nothing left him but a bare desolate earth to live on, necessity drives him into a temporary submission. "Forgive me this once; take away from me this death only."

Constrained repentance is short and fruitless. The west wind, with the locusts, drives away his remorse—and now he is ready for another judgment. Now a gross darkness, a darkness real and sensible, takes away the sight of heaven. Now they imagine that the sun is lost out of the firmament and withdrawn for ever; that all things are returning to their original confusion when darkness was on the face of the deep. All think themselves miserable, past remedy; whilst the obduracy of Pharaoh is changed into desperation. "Get thee from me, see my face no more; when thou seest my face thou shalt die." What is this but to seek for the punishment and fly from the remedy? When God's messengers are abandoned, destruction is near. Moses will see him no more till he behold him dead upon the sands, while God reserves his last and most fearful plague for the conclusion.

In one night, in one instant, every house hath in it a breathless corpse. No man could comfort another. Every one is too full of his own sorrow, and the cry of the city ascends to heaven. Now are the Egyptians as importunate in entreating their guests to depart as they were before peremptory in their refusal. Now they freely bestow on them their rich jewels, the well-earned recompense of their past labor, the support of their present journey. God's people staid like slaves: they go away like conquerors, with the spoils of those that hated them—armed for security and wealthy for maintenance.

Far different is the state of Israel since their progenitor went with his staff and his scrip over Jordan. In

spite of their bondage and bloodshed they go forth six hundred thousand men. Tyranny itself is too weak where God bids increase and multiply. Lo, that very night, when the time appointed is expired, Israel is gone; and the same God who brought them out, is their guide and protector; choosing their way, not with respect to what is nearest, but what is safest. He would not have his people so suddenly change from bondage to war.

And as he *chooses*, so he guides their journey. That they might not err in the pathless desert, he himself goes before them. Who could but follow cheerfully when God leads the way? He who conducted the wise men by a star, guides Israel by a cloud. *That* was a higher object, therefore he gave them a heavenly signal. This was more earthly, therefore he contents himself with a lower representation of his presence. A pillar of clouds and fire—a pillar for firmness, of clouds and fire for visibility and use. The greater light extinguishes the less. In the day he shows them not fire, but a cloud; in the night he shows them not the cloud, but fire. The one guards them against the heat of day, the other against the cold vapors of the night. The same God is a cloud and fire to his children, showing himself to them in such form as best suits their necessities.

No sooner are the Israelites gone than Pharaoh determines to bring them back, though at the hazard of more plagues from God. The Egyptians knew that the Hebrews were not trained up for war, that they were weary with their journey and long servitude, while themselves were soldiers by profession, furnished with horses, and with chariots of iron. They give themselves, therefore, the victory already, and the very Israelites are talking of their graves. They behold the sea before them, behind them the Egyptians; they know

not which is most merciless, and are stricken with the fear of both. O God, thy patience is no less a miracle than thy power; they had seen thy wonders in Egypt and in Goshen, they saw thy pillar even now before them, and yet did they more fear Egypt than believe thee! But still thou dost undertake the defence of thy people. Thy cloudy pillar removes and stands between the Israelites and the Egyptians, as if thou wouldst exclaim, "They shall overcome me, O Israel, ere they injure thee." Wonder now strove with fear among the people, when they saw the cloud move behind them, the sea retreat before them. They were not used to such bulwarks. Jehovah stood behind them in the cloud; the sea reared them up walls on either side—that which they feared would be their destruction protected them. How easily can God make his most terrible creatures our friends and patrons!

Pharaoh sees all this, and wonders; yet thinks he not that God hath made a difference between him and Israel, nor sees why he may not trust the sea as well as they. Lo, till he and his host arrive in the midst of the now dry channel, not one wave may rise against them; but when they are too far to return they are stricken with their last terror. God pursues them, and they cannot fly from him. The sea shows them that it regards the rod of Moses, not the sceptre of Pharaoh. It swallows them up in its waves and casts them upon its sand for a spectacle of triumph to their adversaries, who now magnify God for their deliverance, and exchange their cries of terror for songs of exultation.

## 12.—ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS.

God taught his people by *actions* as well as by *words*. While they follow Moses through the wilderness, whom they followed through the sea, he who called them to the land of promise gives them at the entrance on their journey thirst and bitterness. The ways of sin appear pleasant in the beginning, but are afterwards full of misery. Holiness inures us to the worst at first, and sweetens our conclusion with pleasure. O thou, who hast undertaken to conduct us to our better country, how faithful, how powerful do we find thee! How fearlessly should we trust thee! How cheerfully should we follow thee through contempt, poverty, death itself! "Master, if it be thou, bid us come unto thee."

Yet none have on earth such bitter draughts as those whom God loves best. He will not expose his flock to the dangers of war, but he delays not to make trial of their patience at the waters of Marah. O Savior, thou didst drink a more bitter cup from the hand of thy Father than that which thou didst refuse at the hand of the Jews, or than that which we can drink from thee!

The Israelites, instead of praying to God, murmur against Moses—yet what hath the righteous done? He made not either the wilderness dry or the waters bitter. The presence of God went before them, yet Moses is murmured at. It is the hard fate of those in authority, that when the multitude are prosperous they praise *themselves*; when they are unfortunate, they blame their governors. Who shall hope to be free, if Moses escape not? Behold, the first occasion of want makes the Israelites rebels. No benefits can stop the mouth of ingratitude. One year of famine, one month of unseasonable weather, one week of pestilence, makes us overlook all the variety of blessings we receive from God; and we charge our Maker foolishly.



Moses takes the course that they should have done, he prays fervently to God, and pours out his heart to one who never lets his servants cry to him in vain. No sooner hath he shown his sorrows, than God shows a remedy; yet a remedy of such a miraculous kind as demonstrates that all things are subject to the command of their Creator.

The *thirst* of Israel is quenched, and now they complain of *hunger*. While their provision lasted they were content to pray for their daily bread; but when this fails, their faith fails in proportion. They should have said, "He that commanded the sea to guard us, can as easily command the earth to nourish us; he who made the rod a serpent, can make these stones bread. Why do we not rely on him whom we have found so powerful?" Nature is cheerful in the sunshine of prosperity—is never weary of *receiving*; but when the sky is overcast and the clouds of affliction intervene, faith and hope are lost amidst the murmurs of impatience; "Would to God that we had died in Egypt!"

When the anger of the Lord might have been expected in fire, his glory appears in a cloud. He who heard their murmurings, instead of punishing, gratifies them. They desired meat, and have quails; they desired bread, and have manna. What a table did God prepare in the desert! Never was prince so served in his greatest pomp, as these rebellious Israelites in the wilderness. How bounteous is our God to those that please him, who is thus liberal even to offenders! O how plentiful, Lord, is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, and that thou hast prepared for them that put their trust in thee, even before the sons of men! O Lord, thy mercy is not shortened to give; quicken thou our hearts, lift up our hands, open our mouths in prayer and praise.

Yet though God will relieve them with *provision*, he will punish their *impatience*; they shall know themselves to be his people; but they shall feel that they were mutinous. It is a fearful thing to abuse the lenity of God. His mercy is abundant; but his justice will not always sleep. It is through our own infatuation if we do not take warning.

To find flesh in the wilderness is unusual; but for bread to come down from heaven was still more wonderful. They had seen quails before, manna they never beheld till now. What an assemblage of miracles was here! In its quantity, in its place, in its composition, in its quality, in the difference of its fall on the eve of the Sabbath, in its preservation in the ark, in its continuance, in its cessation. When they came to taste the bread of Canaan, it then withdrew itself, as if it had said, "ye need no miracles now ye have means."

They had the types; we have the substance. In this wilderness of the world the true manna is rained upon our hearts. We know who hath said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." All their meals were spiritual; every morsel they did eat was sacramental—and we, in the true Sabbath of our glorious rest, shall for ever feed on that manna which we have gathered in this our day of preparation.

Still God observes a vicissitude of evil and good; lo, the Israelites thirst again at the rock of Rephidim. When we see our afflictions removed from us for a season, we must expect the possibility of their return.

O the presumption of that bold inquiry, "Is the Lord among us or no?" What could God do more to convince them of his presence, when every moment brought with it a new miracle? The plagues of Egypt and the division of the sea were noised abroad even to Jericho. Their waters were lately made sweet; quails had been sent them as the sand of the sea; the manna

was showered on them from heaven; they saw the pillar of the cloud! and yet they say, "Is the Lord among us?" No argument is enough to an incredulous heart. If they are most blessed who have not seen and yet have believed, how lamentable is their state who close their eyes against the beams of light—whose obduracy is proof against reason, sense, and experience!

But such is the deep ingratitude of carnal minds. If they prosper, (even in wickedness,) they assert that God is with them. If they are thwarted in their designs, they distrust, and murmur, and mutiny. In their want, they lament his absence—in their sin, they *wish* for it; and yet wickedness, rather than affliction, argues him to have turned away his face—for then is he most present when he most chastises.

There is no expostulating with an unreasonable multitude; Moses flies to Him who was able to quench their thirst and their fury. Wisely do we betake ourselves to Heaven in cases of doubt and danger. We shall find difficulties in all great enterprises. If we dare beg God to prosper them, we may securely cast all events upon his providence, who knows both how to dispose and how to end them.

In these perilous circumstances a less courageous leader would have thought of flight. Moses betakes himself to prayer—and that not for revenge, but help. We hear him not exclaiming, "Twice have they mutinied and been pardoned; yet lo, again they madly rebel—preserve *me* and punish *them*, O Lord!" On the contrary he seeks to God in their behalf; he imitates the mercy and long-suffering of his Creator; he prays, and his prayer is heard.

"Take thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river." Thus doth the Almighty vouchsafe to strengthen the faith of his servant; who might well expect this wonder, from that which he had tried, to be miraculous. No-

thing confirms the regenerate heart more than the recollection of past mercies. The rod, which had turned the waters into blood and the sea into a rampart, opens the rock of stone and the waters flow out—to convince and to shame the infidelity of Israel.

And now, unless their hearts had been more obdurate than the rock, tears of penitential sorrow must have burst from their eyes. Now the water they drink, as well as the bread they eat, is typical and figurative.

The rock that followed them was Christ. From him proceed those living waters whereby the thirst of all true believers is refreshed. Let us but thirst, O Lord, not with repining, but with faith, those streams shall abundantly flow into our souls, and follow *us*, till the water be changed into that new wine which we shall drink with thee in the kingdom of thy Father!

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### 13.—THE LAW.

What a wonderful agreement do we find between the two testaments! In the very time of their delivery there is the same coincidence as in their substance. The ancient Jews kept our festivals and we keep theirs. The feast of the passover is the time of Christ's resurrection, when he rescued our human nature from the bondage of death. Christ himself is our paschal lamb, a bone whereof must not be broken. On the very day wherein the Almighty came down in flame and thunders to deliver the law, came down the Holy Ghost on the disciples in fiery tongues, for the promulgation of the Gospel. The first in fire and smoke, where obscurity was mingled with terror—the last in a bright fire, denoting the light and clearness of the Gospel—fire, not in flashes,

but in tongues—not to terrify, but to instruct. The proclamation of the law makes way for the reception of a better covenant.

The contagion of the sins of Egypt still adhered to Israel—from this they must now be purified. God requires preparation on the part of his people, that they may be fitted for hearing his commandments. If such previous holiness was necessary, that the Israelites might receive the law, what manner of persons ought we to be that we may obtain the mercy promised in the Gospel?

Neither must themselves only be purified, but their very garments; that by this outward act they might learn with what souls to appear before their Creator. The God of spirits looks to the inner man, and requires more especial sanctity where we most resemble himself. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters," saith the Lord Almighty.

Thus washed, thus sanctified, they are still prohibited from approaching the mount. God expects from his creatures the *fear* as well as the love of children. He would have us acquaint ourselves with him in the path of obedience; but he is awful in his ordinances—he wills us to tremble at his word and judgments.

Behold the difference betwixt the law and the Gospel! There, the very hill where God appeared might not be touched by the purest Israelites; here, the multitude thronged the Savior and pressed him; yea, his very face was not withdrawn even from the impious Judas. There, the earth on which he descended was prohibited them. Here, his body and blood are offered to our acceptance. O marvellous kindness of our God! How ungrateful are we, if we acknowledge not this pre-eminence over his ancient people! They who were his own were strangers in comparison of our liberty.

It is our shame and sin if we are no better acquainted with our heavenly Father than they who, in the time of his immediate intercourse with man, were not permitted to approach the majesty of his glory.

God is ever wonderful in his works and fearful in his judgments—but he was never so terrible in the *execution* of his will, as now in the *promulgation* of it. Here was nothing but a display of grandeur in the eyes, in the ears of the Israelites, as if God meant to show them by this how dreadful he could be. Here was the lightning darted in their eyes, the thunders roaring in their ears, the heavenly trumpet drowning the thunderclaps, the voice of God out-speaking the trumpet of the angel, the cloud encircling Sinai, the smoke ascending, the fire flaming, the mountain trembling, paleness and death in the face of Israel, and all the glory of heaven turned into terror. In the destruction of the first world there were *clouds*—in the destruction of Sodom there was *fire*—but here were fire, smoke, clouds, thunder, earthquakes, and whatsoever might work more astonishment than was ever in any vengeance inflicted.

And if the law were thus *given*, how shall it be *required*? If such were the proclamation of God's statutes, what shall be his tribunal? I see and tremble at the resemblance. The trumpet of an angel called to the one, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God shall summon us to the other. Of the one, Moses, who alone witnessed it, saith, "God came with the multitude of his saints"—in the other, thousand thousands shall minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand shall stand before him. In the one, Mount Sinai only was in a flame—all the world shall be so in the other. In the one, there were thunders and fires—in the other, a fiery stream shall proceed from him, where-by the elements shall melt with fervent heat—the heavens and earth shall be dissolved—they shall flee away,

and have no place. O God, how powerful art thou to execute vengeance upon sinners, who didst thus forbid sin? If thou wert so terrible a Lawgiver, what a Judge shalt thou appear? What shall be their doom who are guilty of transgressing that law, whose very delivery was little less than death? If God exact his law in the rigor with which it was given, alas, who may abide it? But happy are they whom the Gospel hath rescued from the terrors of that law, which was given in fire, and in fire shall be required.

God would have Israel see that they had not a Governor whose commands might be neglected or trifled with—and therefore, before he gives his people a law, he shows them that he can command heaven, earth, water, fire, air, by the mere signification of his will—thus teaching them that it was a fearful thing to displease such a Legislator, or violate such statutes—while they beheld the elements examples of that obedience which man should always yield to his Maker.

This fire wherein the law was given, remains in it, and will never depart—hence are those terrors which it flashes in every man's conscience who hath felt remorse for sin. Every man's heart is a Sinai, and resembles to him both heaven and hell. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

O royal law and mighty Lawgiver! How could they think of having *any other* God, who had such evidence of the divine power of the God of Israel? How could they think of making any *resemblance* of him whom they could not see, but whom they knew to be infinite? How could they dare to profane his *name*, who proclaimed himself to them by the incommunicable name of Jehovah? How could they refuse to observe his sacred *day*, when they saw him command those luminaries by which days and years are measured? How could they refuse to render honor and fear to those who derive their *au-*

*thority* from God, when they saw him able to assert his own, and maintain that of his vicegerents upon earth? How could they think of *killing*, when they were so strongly affected with the fear of Him who thus manifested himself able to save and to destroy? How could they think of the flames of impure *desires*, who beheld such fires of vengeance? How could they think of *stealing* from others, when they saw who was Lord of heaven and earth, from whom their neighbor derived all his possessions? How could they think of *speaking falsely*, when they heard the God of truth speak in so tremendous a voice? How could they think of *coveting* what was another's, when they saw how weak and uncertain a right they had to what was their own?

Lord, to us was the *moral* law delivered, as well as to them. The letter and ceremonial is passed away; the spirit remains, and shall remain to the end of time. There had not been such state in thy promulgation of it, if thou hadst not intended it for eternity. How should we, who comply with human laws to avoid some trifling forfeiture, how should we fear Thee, O God, who art able to cast both soul and body into hell?

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#### 14.—THE VEIL OF MOSES.

Scarce a month was past since the Israelites made a covenant with Jehovah—since they trembled to hear him say, "Thou shalt have no other gods but me"—and now they say, "Make us gods to go before us." O ye senseless Israelites, have you so soon forgotten that fire and thunder? Is that smoke vanished out of your *mind* as well as your *sight*? Can ye, in the very



face of Sinai, call for other gods? Can ye presume to say, ye know not what is become of Moses? Did he not rush for your sakes into the midst of those flames which ye feared to see afar off? Had he fled away from you into the wilderness, what could ye have done more? But if he had indeed been gone for ever, must ye therefore have gods made? If ye had said, "Choose us another governor," it had been ungrateful and senseless; but to say, "Make us gods," was *absurdly* impious. The presence of God depended not on that of Moses—still ye beheld him, though his servant was absent, in his pillar and in his manna. Oh the ingratitude of carnal minds! Who would not have said, "Moses is not with us, but he is with God for us—he stays long—God, who called him, withholds him—his *delay* is for our sakes, as well as his ascent. Though we see him not, we will hope for him—or if God will keep him from us, he can supply the loss, or conduct us without him. His fire and cloud are all-sufficient. We will, we can have no other God—we desire not any other guide." Thus would faith and hope have argued. Natural men will have God himself subservient to their wayward wishes, and if they are disappointed, will cast him off—while his true disciples wait long and seek him—not only in their sinking, but from the bottom of the deeps call upon him, and though he slay them, will put their trust in him.

Behold, our better Moses was with us a while upon earth; he is now ascended up to the heights of heaven to intercede and mediate for us. Shall we now think of another Savior? Shall we not hold it our happiness that he is for our sakes above?

Sudden fears, when they have possessed weak minds, lead them into shameful errors. Aaron, who alone followed Moses into the trembling and fiery hill of Sinai, and heard God say, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, for I am a jealous God"—this very

Aaron calls for the ear-rings of the Israelites, makes a graven image, raises an altar, consecrates a day to it, calls it their God, and weeps not to see them dance before it. The very gold of Egypt is contagious; the ornaments which were bestowed on Israel in their flight, are perverted to the idolatry of the first owners. The sin was deep and grievous—this idolatry is shameful; he whom they had offended sends down Moses to remedy their sin.

Never was there so precious a record as that which Moses now held in his hand. How then durst he fail in his trust to that God whose pledge he had received with awe and reverence? Alas, while we are in the body of sin nothing can bereave us of infirmity. He who was the meekest on earth, in sudden indignation abandons that which in a calmer moment he would have held dearer than his life. He forgets the law *written*, when he sees it *broken*, and is more anxious to deface the idol than to preserve the tables. The goodness of God pardons the indiscretion of honest zeal, and doth not consider the failings of our mortal weakness as an imputation on our fidelity. Lo! he entrusts Moses with his second law, because he saw sincerity of heart even in his errors.

But lately did Moses fast forty days—again he goes up to Sinai, and takes not any repast with him. His meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent him; he goes up confidently, in the sure trust that God was with him. There is no life comparable to that of faith—man does not live by bread only. The vision of God satisfied and feasted his servant. How perfect, how glorious will be that state of existence, when we shall behold Him as he is, if the frail mortality of Moses was sustained and comforted with only the representation of his presence!

We see Moses, who received the law, Elias, who

restored it, and Christ, who fulfilled it, all fasting forty days; and we find them together in glory on Mount Tabor. Abstinence has no merit in itself; but it is in many cases a preparation for holy duties. Hence solemn prayer takes fasting to attend it, and speeds more swiftly to heaven when it is so accompanied.

When Moses came down first from Sinai, his eyes sparkled with anger and his face glowed with zealous indignation—now it is bright with glory. Before, there were the flames of fury in it; now, the beams of majesty. The more familiarly we become acquainted with God, the more do we partake of his nature. How did the heart of Moses shine with illumination while his face was thus enlightened!

That which should have comforted the Israelites affrights them. Aaron himself, who went up into the mount to see and speak with God, is now afraid of him who hath seen God. Such a fear there is in guilt, such a security in innocence. When the soul is free from sin it shall fly to that glory with joy, the least glimpse of which now appals it, and sends it away in terror.

Moses marvels to see Israel run away from their guide, as from an enemy; and not knowing the cause of their consternation, invites, exhorts them to return.

“O my people, whom do ye fear? It was for your sakes I ascended Sinai—for you I staid—for you I came down. Here are no armed Levites to strike you, no Amalekites nor Egyptians to pursue you, no fires nor thunders to dismay you. I have not the rod of God in my hand, which ye have seen command the elements. Or if I had, so far am I from proposing any rigor against you, that even now I have in your behalf appeased the wrath of the Almighty; and lo! here is the pledge of his reconciliation. God sends me to you for good; and do ye thus quit your best friend? Whither will ye go, either *from* me or *without* me? At least stay

and hear the commandments of that God from whom ye *cannot* flee."

They perceive his voice the same, though his face was changed—they are persuaded to stay, to return, to hear him whom they dare not see—and now, after many doubtful steps advancing nearer, take courage to tell him he was grown too glorious.

Moses, finding they could not look on the sun of his face, clouds it with a veil; choosing rather to hide the work of God in him, than to want opportunity of revealing the divine will to Israel. He urges not, that if there were glory in his face, God placed it there—that he would not have placed it so conspicuously had he meant it to be concealed. He does not bid them hide *their* faces rather, which are blemished with their sin; but modestly conceals his own radiance, and seeks nothing but that his words might pierce into their ears. It is good for a man sometimes to hide his graces, and not always to live at the utmost pitch of his strength. The patriarch had more glory by his veil than by his face.

Many a precious jewel is deposited in the bosom of the earth; many a pearl lies hidden in the abyss of waters—many a star, by reason of its height, is scarcely visible to the eye. How did our true Moses, in the veil of his flesh, conceal the glory of his deity, and not only lay aside his majesty, but put on our weakness, concluding his divine miracles with the charge, "See thou tell no man!" Now, as the veil of God, which hid his presence in the holy of holies, was rent when the Savior exclaimed, "It is finished," so the veil of Moses was at the same moment pulled off. We daily see Christ, the completion of the law—Israel would not look to the end of that which should be abolished.

When Moses went to speak with God, he pulled off his veil, presenting to the Almighty the face he had

first made, and afterwards made glorious. Hypocrites observe a contrary procedure. They show their *best* to men, their *worst* to God—but God sees both their veil and their face ; and beholds, with equal abhorrence, their veil of dissimulation and their face of wickedness.

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### 15.—K O R A H.

Scarcely had Israel ceased to feel the punishment of their last act of disobedience when they offend yet more deeply. The multitude is a raging sea, full of the unquiet billows of discontent. While God only threatened them they became bold in their sin ; it was time they should be made acquainted with the terrors of his wrath. Other warnings failed of their effect ; at last the Almighty had recourse to the arrows of his heaviest indignation.

In the mean time how was the peace of Moses destroyed by these successive acts of rebellion in his people ! Danger and calumny were the rewards of his laborious government. Alas, far more peaceful was his lot amidst the sheep of Jethro, than with these wolves of Israel. But, as he dared not quit his crook without the authority of heaven, so neither will he resign his sceptre till he be dismissed by him who called him ; no troubles, no oppositions will tempt him to forego his duty. Who shall chase the servant of God from that station in which he is placed by his Maker ?

Moses is the *prince* of Israel, Aaron the *priest* ; the one was mild, the other popular ; they were brethren in office as well as in blood, yet both are conspired against, both are opposed at once. Ecclesiastical and civil trea

sons are too frequently found to inhabit the same bosom.

There cannot be conceived an honor which tended less to excite envy, than this principality of Israel; a people who could bestow nothing, who had nothing themselves but in distant reversion; a people whom their leader, as the vehicle of God's mercies, sustained with miraculous bread and water; a people, the care of whom was only a burden; and who repaid the greatest benefits with the deepest ingratitude. And yet this dignity renders Moses obnoxious to Korah and his companions. Nature is ever envious and disdainful, and loves to undermine those walls which it cannot scale. Three traitors, on the most frivolous pretences, seduce from their allegiance two hundred and fifty rulers, famous in the congregation, men of renown.

Nothing can be more pleasing to the populace than to hear their governors slandered and themselves unjustly praised. "All the congregation is holy, every one of them. Wherefore lift ye up yourselves?" Every word of the charge is false. Moses sought to *abase* himself. It was God that exalted him over Israel. And in proportion to the *arrogance* of Moses was the *holiness* of his adversaries! It was a tissue of infidelity, cowardice, idolatry, envy, mutiny and disobedience. If this be holiness, where shall we seek for impiety? The vengeance of God was even now fresh in their memory—vengeance drawn on them by repeated offences against the Majesty of heaven—and yet these miscreants say, "All Israel is holy!"

Moses argues not for himself, but has recourse to God; and the same tongue that appeals against the conspirators prays for the people. Korah had so far prevailed that he had seduced the multitude to his side. And now God, jealous of his insulted honor, threatens to exterminate them at once, when he is addressed in their behalf by that priest and by that prophet against

whom their tumultuous outcries were directed. Moses and Aaron were more sensible of the injuries done to religion than to themselves; they were well aware that these traitors deserved only death; and yet they could not endure the thought of obtaining tranquillity by the sufferings of their enemies. The people rise up against their governors. The governors fall prostrate before God and implore his mercy on the people: so far are they from meditating revenge that they prevail with their heavenly Avenger to suspend the stroke of his indignation.

Korah kindled the fire—two hundred and fifty princes spread the flames—all the congregation repair to the pernicious light—but only the incendiaries perish. In the midst of God's most tremendous anger he can distinguish between the depravity of the seducers and the ignorance and folly of those whom they mislead. Now do the Israelites owe their life to them whose authority they denied, whose destruction they meditated. "Get you up from the tabernacles of Korah." The very society of wicked men, especially in their sins, is full of the most alarming danger. If we will not separate ourselves from them we must expect to be involved in their condemnation. By associating with them we share in their crimes; what marvel if we share in their punishment?

As yet it was not too late: had Korah even now acknowledged his complicated guilt, the uplifted arm of vengeance would not have fallen. But the presumptuous traitor and his associates stand boldly in their tents, as if they would out-face the vengeance of God—as if Moses had never wrought a miracle before them—as if no one Israelite had ever bled for rebelling. Pride and infidelity harden the heart and make even cowards presumptuous.

As soon as the more innocent are departed the guilty

perish. The ground cleaves asunder and swallows up the rebels! To have seen them stricken dead in the moment of their sin had been fearful; but to see the earth at once their executioner and their grave, was still more horrible. All the elements conspire to obey their Creator. Both sea and earth close their jaws upon the adversaries of God. Now might Israel see against whom they had exalted their voice and lifted up their eyes on high.

It is dangerous to usurp sacred functions: the ministry will not protect the man; the man may disgrace the ministry. Nadab and Abihu brought unhallowed *fire*—Korah and his company unhallowed *persons*—both perish by the just judgment of God.

The common people, who had assembled by the flattering persuasions of these rebels, now run with terror from the sight of their doom; not trusting the very earth they stood on, while they knew their hearts had been false. Blessed are they who flee from sin and not from punishment.

But, alas, when shall we see an end of these murmurings and the ensuing judgments? Because Korah rebelled he was consumed with his associates; because they were consumed, the people rise up against Moses and Aaron; and again judgment falls on them for their disobedience—wrath is gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun.

Moses, though the beloved of God, dares not take upon himself this reconciliation. He knew that it was the *priest's* office to make atonement for the people. Aaron only must offer up the incense of public prayer to God; Aaron, whom these rebels had rejected with contempt, can alone prevent the general destruction.

The holy man, armed with the shield of his proper ministry, presents himself before an avenging God; as if he had said, "Smite me, O Lord, or spare thy delud-



ed Israel!" He stands boldly between the living and the dead, as if he would either die with the one or would have the other live with him. The ministers of God must not regard their own perils in the general calamities of the church; their prayers must ascend to heaven and arrest the stroke of vengeance. When the fire of God's anger is kindled their censers must smoke from the altar. Every christian must pray for the removal of the Divine indignation; much more they whom God hath appointed to mediate for his people. The atonement of Aaron found acceptance with the Almighty; he spared the offenders because he would not strike the intercessor.

And if *Aaron's* sacrifice was thus effectual, how much more shall the Mediator of a better covenant deliver offenders from wrath? Thou, the great High Priest of our profession, didst thus stand between the dead and the living, that all who believe in thee should not perish. Aaron offered, and was not stricken; but thou, O Savior, wouldst offer, and even become the victim, that by thy stripes we might be healed—that we might be ransomed from the power of the grave. Thou art he that livest and wast dead; and behold thou art alive for evermore, who art also on the throne of God, who makest intercession for us. Amen.

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#### 16.—B A L A A M.

The destruction of the kings of the Amorites and of Bashan disturbs not Balak, till he beholds the conquerors encamped on the plains of Moab. They are encamped, indeed, but without menace of hostility; travellers,

powerful to avenge themselves if injured, but neither invaders nor oppressors. Now he joins with Midian in consultation against them, and tries to effect their ruin by the tongue of Balaam. When other projects are ineffectual the magician is sought to. Why did not the king of Moab come to Israel with overtures of friendship? Why did he not reflect, "Either the God of Israel is *more* or *less* mighty than Chemosh? If less, why are we afraid of him? If more, why do we not serve him? The same hand which gives them victory can give us protection!"

The malicious reap no joy from their own prosperity while the objects of their hatred are prosperous. Had Balak desired nothing but security for *Moab*, he would have requested a blessing from the prophet on his own people; not an execration upon Israel. Alas, if the curses of evil men could be effectual, the world would be darkness and desolation. The king of Moab shall learn that short is the power of Balaam; that neither himself nor his prophet can avoid that vengeance which he seeks to bring down on the militant church of God.

Let it not be matter of surprise to us, that the true God addresses himself to a false prophet. He may bestow words where he will not bestow favor. It is not merely the sound of the Divine voice which publishes loving-kindness and mercy. He may speak to an enemy; he speaks *peace* only to his children. It is a vain boast, "God hath spoken to me." *What* spake he? Did he say to thy soul, "I am thy salvation?" Did he make a covenant with thee, that he would be thy God, and that thou shouldst be his servant? They that hear *this* voice have indeed a blessed foretaste of heaven.

God prevents both the journey and the curse of Balaam. He, who knows how insufficient is the malice of wicked men, will not allow the king of Moab the poor encouragement he sought. Balak esteemed the sorcerer-

er a true prophet; and Jehovah would not have his name profaned among the heathen by the usurping it to a diabolical purpose. How many evils does the Almighty avert, of the existence of which we are ignorant! The sons of Jacob are at peace in their tents—they know not what is meditating against them—God alone hears, and derides, and brings to nought the counsels of their enemies. He that keepeth Israel maketh the devices of the wicked to be of none effect, and casteth out the counsels of the princes.

The proffered rewards would at once have procured the presence and the curse of a covetous prophet, if God had not forbidden him. How often are wicked men checked by Divine Providence, even where they have every probability of success! Whence is it that the world is not over-run with evil, but because the goodness of God endureth continually?

Balaam at first view appears wise and honest—he will not give a sudden answer—he demands leisure to consult with God, and declares he will be regulated by the word of the Almighty. But when he is called on to *act*, he prevaricates and dissembles—suppresses the oracle of heaven, “thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed”—insinuates his own eagerness in the cause, and casts the blame of the prohibition on God, “The Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you.”

The message is not such as to make Balak despair of attaining the object of his wishes: more princes, and more honorable, form his second embassy. O that we were as solicitous to obtain the favor of heaven as wicked men are to strengthen their alliance with the powers of darkness! Why do we faint in spiritual things when the gifts of God are not *denied*, but *delayed*?

How artful is falsehood when assuming the garb of truth! Here was piety in the lips of Balaam, but covet-

ousness in his heart. If he had not been disposed to listen to the king of Moab, why did he again apply to God after he had received so positive a refusal? If his mind had not been seduced already, why did he detain the messengers? why did he expect a change in God? why did he give hopes of success to those who gave him hopes of recompense? One prohibition is enough for a good man; he dares not ask a second time what has once been peremptorily forbidden.

Yet has this importunity obtained a permission, but a permission worse than a denial. Some things God tolerates in his indignation; not approving the act, but suffering the sinner to proceed in his path of disobedience. God commands Balaam to go, as Solomon directs the young man to walk in the way of his heart, and after the sight of his eyes. "My people would not hear my voice—would not obey me—so I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations." It is as if he had said, "*Since thou art so eager for the journey, be gone.*" How much better is it to have a gracious denial, than an angry acquiescence from God?

Now does the covetous Balaam hasten on his way—now he makes himself sure of his success—his corrupt heart tells him, that as God had relented in one instance, he might also in another, and might give permission to curse. The night seems long to his impatience; the prospect of wealth will not suffer him to sleep; his eyes prevent the nightwatches, that he might be occupied in evil.

It is no marvel that the anger of heaven should be excited against such criminal solicitude. God, who saw the heart of Balaam, saw what disposition reigned there; he saw that his covetous desires and wicked hopes grew stronger the more nearly they seemed to approach to their completion; he saw, that if he wanted

the *power* he did not want the *inclination* to curse. Our inward disposition is the life of our actions; by this doth the God of spirits try us, while men pass judgment on our external conduct. An angel is sent to withhold the hasty sorcerer—the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbids the madness of the prophet.

Notwithstanding this miraculous interference, which should have filled him with horror and astonishment, he dares yet proceed on his journey. Now are messengers sent to Balak with news of the approach of his welcome guest. He who sent princes to summon him to his court, comes himself on the way to meet him—pays the most extravagant honors to one from whom he expects the elevation of Moab—prepares, as for a festival, for the execration of his enemies.

The superstitious king, as if he had already obtained his purpose, feasts his prophet, his princes, his people; and on the morrow carries the soothsayer to the high places of his idol. Who can now doubt that Balaam is a false prophet, when he is seen sacrificing in the mount of Baal? Had he adhered to the cause of truth, he would have said, "Throw down these trophies of idolatry," not, "Build me here seven altars." But here is nothing but a vain-glorious and magnificent pretence of devotion. False worshippers make pompous shows of piety, and splendid exhibitions of religion; but God knoweth the heart.

Now, when Balaam sees his victims smoking on the altars, he goes up into the mount, a counterfeit Moses, to receive the answer of God. "And will God meet with a sorcerer? will he make a prophet of a magician?" Nay, but, O man, who art thou that prescribest to God what instruments he shall use? He knows how to employ not only saints and angels, but evil men and evil spirits to his own glory. Balaam utters only blessings on the people of God, declares their future great-

ness and dominion, and even foretels the promised Messiah, the Star of Jacob, the Sceptre of Israel. How many shall say, "Lord, have we not *prophesied* in thy name?" to whom it shall be answered, "I say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

What a madness is that of Balaam, who hopes to change success by change of place, and still dares to importune his God for permission to curse! The reward was before him on the one hand, the avenging angel on the other; he loved the bribe, but he feared the angel. And, while he is in this distraction, his tongue blesses against his heart; his heart curses against his tongue; till at last, rather than lose his hopes, he resolves to speak worse than curses—brings down vengeance on the people of God by enticing them to sin, and justly perishes by the sword of Israel.



## 17.—THE DEATH OF MOSES.

After many painful and dangerous enterprises the great leader of Israel draws near to his rest. He had conducted his people from Egypt, through the sea and through the wilderness, within sight of the promised inheritance. Now is he called on to take possession of that better country, whereof the land which flowed with milk and honey was nothing more than a figure. When we have fulfilled the work which our heavenly Father hath appointed us, to depart and be with Christ is the best of all rewards. This earth is appointed for labor, not for enjoyment: the services of the children of God would meet with a wretched re-

compense if they were always to remain in the regions of mortality. Let no man therefore repine when he sees those summoned from the world who have been faithful to their duty : God hath proved them, and found them worthy for himself. How vain the wish that good men should live for ever ! How vain the regret that they are no more ! He who sent them into the world will confer on them blessings of a more exalted nature than the world can bestow on them. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. It were injurious to wish that excellence should hinder any man from glory.

God, who gave us a being, calls us hence according to his own good pleasure. In the case of Moses, the time, the place, and every circumstance of his dissolution is previously arranged. He must ascend the hill to die. On Mount Horeb he received his charge. On Mount Sinai it was confirmed to him. On Mount Nebo he surrendered it to his God. On Mount Tabor he appears in celestial splendor, to do homage to the Redeemer of mankind. It is a manifest token of the goodness of our heavenly Father; if, when he calls his children from the wilderness of life, he enables them in the hour of their departure to see the land of promise before them, and bids them "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

In what familiar terms is Moses made acquainted with his end ? The word of God addresses him, "Go up, and die." To a soul properly prepared for its departure the tidings of approaching death are neither strange nor horrible ; the tyrant is bereaved of his terrors if his arrival hath been the constant subject of our solemn meditation. The christian considers the grave as an introduction to glory and to God, and obeys the mandate of his Creator with serenity. They, indeed, who know him not, they who have lived without faith, without hope, and as it were without God in the world,

have good cause to tremble, both in their life and in the hour of their dissolution.

God, who had so often condescended to take counsel as it were with Moses, and to impart to him the decrees of his providence respecting *Israel*, now tells the prophet what shall befall *himself*. It is a great advantage to us to have time afforded us for preparation in the most important events of *life*, how much more at the time of our departure from the world! It is a token of judgment, to come as "a thief in the night." We pray God to avert from us the terrible danger of unprepared death. Had the fiery chariot taken away *Elijah* without his being previously taught to expect it, we should have doubted whether it had been sent in anger or in mercy. God forewarns one by sickness, another by old age, another by the loss of all earthly comfort. If the heart is not detached from worldly delusions, it is because of our own folly and obduracy, and we must abide by the consequence!

Long had God decreed that Moses should not set his foot in the promised land. Since that time he had received many favors from above; but the sentence was gone forth from Him, who saith of himself, "I am Jehovah—I change not." Our purposes are like ourselves, fickle and uncertain. His are fixed and immutable. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he purposed, and shall he not make it good? His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

Moses, who had been so careful for the welfare of *Israel* during his life, preserves the same tender anxiety at the moment of his death. He takes no thought for himself; he knows that the exchange will to him be infinitely advantageous. His warfare is accomplished; his iniquity is pardoned. Let the sceptre but pass into a righteous hand, he dies in peace. Some envious natures make use of government only for their own ad-



vantage ; good hearts ever consider the future benefit of the church beyond their own. Moses did well to show his affection to the people ; but had he been silent God would have provided a shepherd for the sheep of his pasture. That wisdom which called the prophet from the flocks of Jethro, will appoint him no unworthy successor. Who can be more proper to receive the sacred trust than one whose name, whose experience, whose talents, whose virtues would supply, would as it were revive Moses to the people ? Joshua, who had searched the land before, was best qualified to guide Israel into it. Joshua, who was endued with the spirit of God, was best qualified to be his representative.

And well doth Joshua succeed Moses. The very acts of God in old time were allegories. Where the law ends, there the Savior begins. In the law we only *see* the land of promise. Jesus, the mediator of the New Testament (whom Joshua prefigured in name as well as in office) can alone *conduct* us into it. So was he a servant of the law, that he supplied to us all its defects ; he hath taken possession of our inheritance for us ; he shall carry us from this wilderness to our rest.

Happy is that people whose rulers bear the sceptre in righteousness ; where the sovereign over men knows no higher title than that which proclaims him the minister of God ! such authority proceeds from above, and is maintained and supported by an Almighty arm—while violence, injustice, and oppression, at once make the people miserable, and proceed from one who is the author of all confusion. Wretched is the state that suffers such tyranny ; wretched is the person who inflicts it ; for both of them have sold themselves, the one to servitude, the other to sin.

What an example of meekness do we behold in the last act of Moses ? He willingly lays his hands on his servant and consecrates him to be his successor. A

gracious heart acquiesces with cheerfulness in the advancement of those whom God delights to honor. Envy and discontent belong to carnal minds; peace and humility are ever attendant on true religion.

The same God who by his angels carried up the spirit of Moses to glory, by his angels transports his body into the valley of Moab for sepulture. Those hands, which had taken the law from God—those eyes, which had seen his presence—those lips, which had conversed with the Almighty—that face, which had been irradiated with beams of heavenly glory, must not be neglected, though the soul is gone. He who preserved his infant body amidst the bulrushes, takes charge even of his lifeless remains. The care of God is manifested towards his children, both in life and in death.

If the ministry of man had been used in this grave of Moses, the place would have been known to the Israelites—but God purposely conceals this treasure, to remove from his people any danger of superstition. Had the relics of saints been just objects of adoration, where had there been so fit an opportunity as this for the exercise of it?

Lo, in the transfiguration, this body, which was hid in the valley of Moab, appears on the hill of Tabor. We know that our earthly tabernacles at the hour of death are not lost, but laid up. They are sown in weakness—they are raised in power. When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall we also appear together with him in glory.

## 18.—J O S H U A .

The successor of Moses had formerly viewed the land of Canaan in person. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and had the oracle of God ready for his direction—yet does he address two spies for a more particular survey. Joshua had been assured that he should lead Israel into the promised land; but he knew it was unsafe to presume. He was aware that his success would not be complete without his own best exertions. Heaven is promised to us—but not to our carelessness, infidelity or disobedience. He who sets this blessed inheritance before us, presupposes our diligence, our faith, our holiness.

The spies repair to the city of Jericho—to the house of Rahab. The goodness of God hath already prepared for their reception, and hath raised up a friend to his people in a woman that was a sinner. Who shall assign limits to the mercy of heaven? To presume on it, is audacity—to despair, is infatuation

It is an easy act of duty to show favor to the professors of religion when the public countenance of the state befriends them; but Rahab hazards her life for these strangers—provides for their security against their enemies—neglects her own countrymen, and fears not the extreme displeasure of her king. We do not find so great faith, no not in Israel. She had heard God's former wonders; and, by his past judgments, she wisely considered of those which were to come. Her faith, anticipating the victories of Israel, provided not only for her own safety but for that of her family. Nature and grace enjoin us to consult the eternal welfare of all, chiefly of those who are joined to us by the ties of blood or alliance. Rahab, ere she dismisses these Israelites, makes a covenant with them, that she, who had saved

their lives, might afterwards be saved by them in return—

The spies bring news of approaching triumph to the camp of Israel. "They faint because of us—therefore the land is ours." The country is populous—the inhabitants are prepared for war; but the Lord of Hosts is with us—the God of Jacob goeth before us. Joshua is on his march by morning; and nothing now detains the children of Israel from the land of promise but the waters of Jordan.

Now the cloud vanishes which hath led them all the way—now they participate for the last time of their celestial food. These supernatural aids were for their pilgrimage, not their rest—for the wilderness, not for Canaan. Yet He who before guided them in the *cloud*, now conducts them by the *ark*—the ark of the testimony, which witnessed both his presence and his love. Within it were the Cherubim, the law, the incorruptible manna. Who can wish for a better guide to the land of promise than the God of heaven, his word, his ordinances? What means can so well direct us thither as those of his own institution?

Nothing is so comfortable to a good heart as to see the pledges of God's presence and favor—to *hear* of his loving-kindness is pleasant, but to behold and experience his mercy is the fulness of joy. What a happy prospect hath God set before *us*, of Christ Jesus crucified for us, and offered to our souls!

The same power which divided the Red Sea before Moses, divides Jordan before Joshua, that his people might see the ark as effectual as the cloud, and the hand of God as present with Joshua to bring them into Canaan, as it was with Moses to bring them out of Egypt. The virtue of the priests who bare the ark was put to its proof—they must first set their foot in the river Jordan, under the confidence that a way shall be made for them through its waters. They whose calling

brings them near to God, must be examples to men of faith as well as obedience.

The floods acknowledge their Maker. That stream into which Christ afterwards went to be baptized retires when the angel of the covenant approaches it with his host. The presence of the ark is a sign to these waters, which flow back to their source, as not daring to touch the feet of the priests who carried it. "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest, and thou, Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" The God who made, controls the very nature of his elements. With what joy did his people tread on the dry channel of Jordan, when they saw the promised land before them! God overcomes all their difficulties, removes every obstacle to their success. O Lord, we commit unto thee the beginning, the progress, and the completion of our glory. Faithful art thou who hast promised—thou also wilt do it.

Now the Israelites see those cities and towers whose height was reported to reach to heaven—now do they prepare for hostilities against a people once the object of their terror. They do not say in distrust, "How shall we scale these invincible fortifications?" What engines shall we use for so vast a work?" They know the efficacy of that promise, "Behold, I have given Jericho into thine hand." If the walls of the city had their foundations in the centre of the earth—if the battlements had been so high that an eagle could not soar over them, this word "I HAVE GIVEN" were enough. In vain are the walls impregnable, the men valiant, the leaders skilful, the king prudent. What can swords or spears, what can wisdom or counsel do against almighty power? Had the captain of the Lord's host drawn the sword *for* Jericho, the gates might have been *opened*—Israel could then no more have taken the city than they could be prevented from entering when the walls were

fallen. But what a siege was this of Jericho! The men of war compass the city with *trumpets*—no mount was raised, no weapon drawn, no engine planted. Doubtless the inhabitants grew scornful and secure—they mocked the God of Israel, and deemed him as it were in jest, when he was preparing for their judgment. The ways of the Almighty are not like our ways—if our reason cannot keep pace with his counsels, let us not therefore question his mighty power, his infinite wisdom. Let us follow his heavenly guidance—let us commit our cause to him, and the hour will surely come, when with a shout of exultation we shall say, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The ark of God casts down the walls of a wicked city. The same power which before had divided the waters, and which afterwards broke in pieces the Philistine idols, demolishes the forts of Jericho. Those spiritual wickednesses which to nature are invincible, are overthrown by the word of God. Alas, the ark of the covenant hath been long amongst us—why are not our corruptions done away? Why do we not follow our Savior? Why do not our hearts attend on him with all their fervency?

When the trumpets sounded long on the seventh day, and when their alarm was joined by the shouts of the Israelites, the walls of Jericho fell down at once. The heavens had rung with the shout of the people—the earth shakes at the fall of these mighty ruins—a solemn, pleasing kind of horror is on the Israelites—despair and death is in the hearts and countenances of their enemies. They had now neither means nor will to resist—astonishment contributes to dispatch them no less than the sword of Israel. God has all the praise, his servants all the victory. Had one warrior assailed the walls, the glory of the Lord of hosts had been diminish-

ed. But here it was his own act; his marvellous act; he will not suffer his honor to be given to another. They gat not the land in possession by their own sword, neither was it their own arm that helped them; but thy right hand and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them, O God!

In the moment of victory Joshua remembers the faith of Rahab. They who received life from her, now return it to her and to her family. They send news of peace and deliverance to that house, where they found their own security in the time of danger. Holy and charitable actions will sooner or later have their recompense. Now Rahab finds what it is to believe in God; while out of an impure and idolatrous city she is incorporated into his holy church, and made the mother of a royal and sacred posterity.



## 19.—THE GIBBEONITES.

The news of Israel's early victories had flown over the mountains and valleys of Canaan; and yet the kings and people prepare for resistance, and rush madly against that judgment which their own enormities had drawn upon their heads.

Only the Gibeonites are wiser than their companions, and resolve to yield and live. Their intelligence was not different from that of others; but, as Rahab saved her family in the midst of Jericho, so these four cities preserved themselves in the midst of Canaan, because they believed in the power of God. Had they joined the forces of their neighbors they would have perished

with them. How wise is that admonition which enjoins us not to follow a multitude in evil—which calls us to unity with the church of God, that we may escape the condemnation of the world! The neighboring cities mocked at this procedure of the Gibeonites, and scorned to ask for safety at the hands of Israel. But in the event, the bodies of these proud heathens lay strewed on the earth, while the others survived and were admitted into covenant with the people of God.

Had they staid till Israel was encamped before their cities, their submission would have been fruitless: now they make a timely peace, and are preserved. There is no wisdom in staying till judgment comes home to us. To solicit God *early* in the time of danger, is the best security against destruction.

I commend their sagacity in seeking peace; but their falsehood in the *manner* of seeking it is as blameable as the credulity of Israel—as the rashness which induced them to complete the covenant without asking advice of God.

The sentence of death was gone out against all the inhabitants of Canaan. Yet the Gibeonites make peace with Israel and live. Amidst the general denunciations of Divine vengeance no man must despair of mercy. If we are convinced of the danger attendant on our sin, we shall cast ourselves at the feet of our Redeemer, (in humble prayer that the God of hope would fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost) and we shall not be condemned with the world.

Still the *fraud* of these Gibeonites admits of no excuse or apology. What a plausible tale did they feign of the remoteness of their country, the reasons for their journey, the consultation of their elders! How artfully did they suppress their knowledge of more recent events, the miraculous passage over Jordan, the capture



of Jericho and Ai, while they studiously recapitulated the *former* demonstrations of Almighty power! The case seemed self-evident; and the children of Israel thought it needless to have recourse to the oracle of God.

And now, within three days, they find out the deceit of these new allies, and their near neighborhood. Joshua well knew the indissoluble nature of the covenant into which he had, however rashly, entered. He will not make the treachery of these heathens a pretext for his own. When he approaches the cities of Gibeon, he does not tell the ambassadors, "Ye came from a far country—these cities are near. This therefore is not the people whom we are engaged to protect. We will destroy these abodes of the Canaanites, and when we come to your distant confines the sword shall rest in its scabbard!" He feels the solemnity of his engagements. He dares not violate the oath of the Lord.

The sequel shows both the wisdom and the piety of Joshua. Three hundred years afterwards, Saul, forgetting or despising the vow of his ancestors, in the transports of misguided zeal, sought to exterminate the descendants of these Gibeonites. But the God of truth proved himself the friend and patron of oppressed innocence; when he made inquisition for blood, he remembered this injured people, and famine desolated the land which had been polluted by perjury and murder.

Joshua and the princes had promised them *life*—they promised them not *liberty*—no covenant was made against their servitude. It was justice on the part of Israel to make them sensible of their past treachery. How dear is life to our nature when we see men content to purchase it at such a rate! The Gibeonites submit to their doom without reluctance, and think themselves fortunate in becoming hewers of wood and drawers of water to the congregation of Israel.

But this is not the end of their calamity and danger. Envy, jealousy and fear combine to raise up the kings of the Amorites against them. Neither evil men or evil spirits can behold without regret the flourishing state of the church. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; angels welcome the convert with songs; hell is full of uproar and fury at his conversion.

The Gibeonites, when they secured the friendship of Joshua, were not aware that they should so soon be compelled to have recourse to that friendship. Now they experience the efficacy of that covenant which entitled them to protection from Israel. Whither should we fly but to our great Deliverer when the powers of darkness are in league against us? If we trust to our own means of resistance we cannot stand—if we rely on his omnipotence we cannot fall.

The noble disposition of Joshua will not let him forsake his new vassals. Though he never promised to hazard his life for theirs, yet he scorns to avail himself of such a wretched subterfuge—he knows no difference between killing them with his own sword and the sword of an Amorite. Their confidence in him is argument enough to draw him into the field. O Savior, if we send our prayers to thee in the day of our trouble, thy mercy will hasten to our relief—never was any soul disappointed which put its trust in thee. Let our faith be but steadfast, it shall not fail of success.

A benefit deferred proves unprofitable. Joshua marches all night and fights all day for the Gibeonites. If *Israel* had been endangered he could have done no more. The noblest of all victories is that which overcomes evil with good, and buries the sense of injuries in a generous pardon.

Joshua fights, but God discomfits the Amorites. He slays them, not only with the sword of his warriors, but with mighty hailstones, the messengers of his wrath.

No wonder these five kings are overwhelmed with horror and despair as they fly. Behind them is the army of Israel, whose force they are unable to resist—above them is the dreadful artillery of heaven, from whose destructive power they are utterly unable to escape. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He shall pour down rain upon the sinners, storm and tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup.

Nor is this the only miracle displayed on the memorable day of Israel's victory. The great luminaries of heaven must stay their course, as if they were called on to witness and to wonder at the overthrow of the enemies of God. That He, who gave them either real or apparent motion, should by his almighty power arrest their progress, would of itself excite astonishment—but how are we amazed at that faith by which a *mortal* speaks to the sun and moon, and in the name of their common Lord enjoins their obedience! It was the glory of God which his zealous champion studied to promote. That all nations might acknowledge him to be supreme both in heaven and earth, Joshua prays, that He, who at this moment was punishing an idolatrous people, would show his sovereignty over the very gods whom they worshipped with impious rites under many horrid symbols. Great was the faith that obtained this miracle—great was the power that effected it. What is there which God cannot do? And what can God do which faith cannot do?

O sing unto the Lord a new song, for he hath done wonderful things—with his own right hand and with his holy arm hath he gotten himself the victory. The Lord declareth his salvation—his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and truth toward the house of Israel—and all the ends of the world have seen the salvation of our God.

## 20.—GIDEON.

After the death of Joshua, and the establishment of Israel in the land of Canaan, we behold a stiffnecked and froward people, elated with peace and liberty, and forgetting Him to whom they owed all the blessings shed on them in such profusion. We behold a continued circle of sins, judgments, contrition, deliverance, and renewed transgression. Conversation with idolaters tempts them to sin—their sin brings down judgments from above—judgments move them to repentance—on their repentance they are delivered—on their deliverance they return to their sin. The ministry of Othniel rescued them from the Mesopotamians; of Ehud, from the Moabites; of Shamgar, from the Philistines; of Barak, from the tyrant of Canaan. But again the people offend; again they are punished; the bondage of Israel under Jabin was freedom in comparison with the yoke of the Midianites. They who had rejected the protection of God are compelled to seek to the mountains for shelter—they, who had transgressed in the face of the sun, hide their sins and their sorrows in dens and caves of the earth.

But the mercy of God is greater than the infirmity of his creatures. He beheld and pitied the afflictions of Israel, he sent a prophet with a message of reproof, an angel with a message of deliverance. While Gideon in fear and trembling hastens to conceal the scanty produce of his fields from the Midianites, the great Angel of the covenant addresses him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor."

While this heavenly visitant, this lord of angels was with Gideon, he might well say, "The Lord is with thee." From Him who sent the Comforter, did ever proceed the true comfort of his church. He knew how

to lay a sure ground of consolation. The only remedy of sorrow and beginning of joy is the presence of God. The same Angel who thus spake to Gideon, spake in after times to the sorrowing apostles, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

Gideon knew not by whom he was thus addressed in the language of encouragement. The word of the Lord was precious in those days, there was no open vision. The promise of deliverance by his means to Israel found not a perfect assent while uttered by an unknown messenger. Fain would he believe, but fain would he have sure grounds for his faith. He asks a sign of the stranger, in token that he was sent from God.

Yet the very hope of these glad tidings, though not ratified as yet by miraculous attestation, awakens in Gideon both joy and thankfulness; he prepares a feast for him who had spoken comfortably to Israel. Gideon prepares a feast, the angel makes it a *sacrifice*. He whose meat and drink it was to do his Father's will, touches the food with his staff (when Gideon imagined he would have blessed and eaten) and suddenly consumes it with fire. While the son of Joash saw and wondered at the spiritual act, he lost sight of the agent.

Now Gideon builds an altar to God, and becomes familiarized to visions and revelations from above. His first commission is to destroy the idol of the Midianites, next, the Midianites themselves. While the altar and grove of Baal stood on the hill of Ophrah in vain should Israel hope to prevail. If we would be delivered from the judgments of God we must examine what false offerings and groves we have in our hearts. These must all be demolished. The true God will have no society with idols *himself*, nor allow it to *us*. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded!" He first abolishes the monuments of superstition, and then enjoins his own

reasonable service. The wood of Baal's grove is made use of to burn a sacrifice unto the true Jehovah.

There needs no further declaration of war. The sons of Midian and Amalek make haste to avenge the indignity offered to their idol—Gideon blows the trumpet, and the people are gathered after him. Now, when he sees himself on the brink of danger, he has recourse to mightier aid; and not daring to trust his thousands of Israel, he flies to God for a further assurance of victory.

The refuge was good—the manner of seeking it indicates distrust. It is easy to be valiant when perils are far distant; but when they are near, and great, and imminent, then not to be dismayed is difficult and glorious. Had God made the proclamation *now*, which was afterwards made by Gideon, "Let the timorous depart," the people of Israel had perhaps been deprived of their leader.

How willing is the Almighty to support and strengthen our weakness! Repeated miracles are called for by his creature, and are wrought by the Creator, to show the son of Joash, that He who was on his side was mightier than all the power of the enemy. The dews of heaven obey his mandate, and at his word they fall, or are withholden. Now we see Gideon armed with faith and resolution—confident of success—at the head of his troops—in the face of the Midianites.

But while their adversaries cover the valley like locusts, and the Israelites think themselves too *few*, God says, "They are too *many*." He is willing to give deliverance to his people, but the honor of the deliverance he keeps to himself, and will diminish the means, that he may have the full measure of glory. O God, thou art not benefited by our best services, whose infinite greatness can receive no addition from thy creatures. It is for our good thou wouldst be magnified by us. Teach us how to receive the blessings of thy

gracious protection, and let both our lips and our lives show forth thy praise!

Gideon's army must be lessened. God will neither be glorified by dastards nor avail himself of any but able champions. O thou of little faith, do the frowns or the laughter of men scare thee from thy God? Doth the hazard of a little land or silver disquiet thee? Art thou afraid of the Midianites in the valley? Away then, away to the world; thou art not fit for the conquering band of Christ. If thou canst not resolve to follow him through infamy, prisons, racks, tortures, death itself, depart to thine house, and save thy life to thy destruction.

And do not the Israelites complain of this indignity? Do not they with one voice pronounce themselves fearless? Do not they aver that those hearts which brought them after their General cannot endure the thought of retiring? Alas! who can trust the faces of men, that sees in the army of Israel two and twenty thousand cowards? How many make a glorious show in the church, who, when they see danger of persecution, shrink from the standard of God? Hope of safety, example of neighbors, desire of praise, fear of censure, the operation of laws, the society of friends, draw many into the field, who (when they see the adversary) repent of the conditions, and, if they may escape, are gone early from Mount Gilead. They deal deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away. What time they wax warm they vanish—when it is hot they are consumed out of their place.

Yet still God complains of the number of his army, and on a second trial dismisses nine thousand seven hundred more. The select band of his appointment leaves not one Israelite to a thousand of the enemies—now is the season for God to join battle. Three hundred men approach an innumerable host, not with sword or spear, but with pitchers, and lights, and trumpets.

The breaking of these pitchers shall dash in pieces the pride of Amalek. The kindling of these lights shall extinguish the light of Midian. The trumpets shall sound an alarm of death to the armies of the aliens. Who shall be able to stand against the power of God? Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear, when the world shall be in flame, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the trumpet of the archangel shall call them to present judgment?

Any of the weakest Hebrews might have broken an empty vessel of earth—have carried a light—have sounded a trumpet—have smitten a flying adversary. But God will not employ an unworthy agent—he will not allow so much as a cowardly torch-bearer.

Now the Israelites pursue, overtake, destroy those tyrants whom once they dared not look in the face. Flight gives advantage to the feeblest adversary—opposition foils the greatest. If we yield to a temptation, our spiritual enemies will trample us in the dust. Let us but resist, and they will flee—let us but stand still, and we shall see the salvation of God.

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## 21.—M A N O A H.

If the wife of Manoah had not been barren, the angel had not been sent to her. Afflictions have this advantage, that they bring down from above those manifestations of Divine mercy which are unknown to the prosperous. The *sick* child experiences most indulgence from a tender parent. God addresses his best comforts to those hearts which stand most in need of his support.

The Angel of God first tells the wife of Manoah the **cause** of her sorrow, and then imparts a message of



joy. "Thou art barren." All our afflictions are known to Him, whose loving correction tends only to our final advantage. The suffering christian would sink under his misfortunes, if he were not persuaded that the eye of God beheld the conflict and would award the crown of victory. He saith to one, "Thou art sick;" to another, "Thou art poor;" to another, "Thou art defamed;" to another, "Thou art oppressed." The all-seeing Father of mankind takes notice of every man's condition, no less than if he sent his angel to tell us so. His knowledge and his mercy are our sure resources in the time of our sufferings. O God, thou knowest both the miseries we feel, and those which have been averted from us by thy gracious interference!

Comfort comes unseasonably to that heart which is not apprehensive of its own sorrow. The angel does not *upbraid* the wife of Manoah with her affliction, but, while he names the cause, declares the remedy. We must first know our evils before we can be delivered from them. If we cannot endure the mention of our infirmities we shall look in vain for their amendment. "Thou art barren, but thou shalt bear a son."

The mother must first be a Nazarite, that her child may be so. The worldling knows no restraint, no moderation; the christian must keep under his body and bring it into subjection. The consecration of God is upon his head—his heart is the temple of the Holy Ghost—the base and sordid gratifications of the world must be rejected with abhorrence. "If thou return to the Almighty, put iniquity from thee."

The wife of Manoah hides not the glad tidings in her own bosom. She imparts them to her husband, whose piety directs him at once to the proper means by which he may attain a more certain confirmation of his hopes. He does not send messengers from place to place in search of the angel, as the children of the prophets af-

terwards sought Elijah—he applies at once to the God who had sent him; he knows that to have recourse to heaven is the most sure and speedy method of obtaining the good he solicits. “O my Lord, I pray thee, let that man of God come again!”

Manoah is a true descendant of that father of the faithful, who believed in God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. He saw not the messenger—he heard not the errand—he examined not the circumstances; yet we find his immediate care to be, how that child shall be *ordered*, which was thus foretold; and his prayers to God are not for the son, which as yet he had not, but for directions as to his education when he should be. The father of John Baptist had the same message; and asking a sign, lost that voice wherewith he asked it. The father of Samson seeks no sign for the promise, but counsel for himself; and yet that angel spake to the priest Zacharias—this, only to the wife of Manoah; that, in the temple, like a glorious spirit—this, in the field, like some prophet or traveller. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed. True faith considers all things foretold as granted, and doubts not of their completion when once they have been promised.

He who sent his heavenly messenger unasked, will not fail to send him again upon entreaty; those blessed spirits are ready both to obey their Maker and to comfort his children. Never was any man repulsed who prayed for direction in his duties to God: rather shall an angel descend from heaven to instruct us, than our good desires shall be frustrated.

As yet Manoah saw nothing which denoted his guest to be more than human, and therefore on his return he offers him an entertainment denoting at once hospitality and gratitude. No man shall bring him good news from God and depart unrecompensed. How beautiful are the

fect of them who bring glad tidings of *eternal* salvation, when he who announces distant *temporal* mercies is thus made welcome!

It is the office of good angels to incite us to piety "If thou wilt offer a sacrifice, offer it unto the Lord." We can never gratify the inhabitants of heaven so much as by our devotions to the God of heaven. Why do we not learn this lesson of them whom we propose to ourselves as patterns of perfect obedience? Hereafter we shall be like angels in our condition; why are we not so now in disposition of mind? If we do not exhort one another to acts of devotion and charity, if we regard a feast more than a sacrifice, we partake not of the nature of angels.

Manoah, while he addresses an oblation to God, will not neglect his messenger. He anxiously desires to know the name of his guest, that he may remember it with honor and gratitude. True piety, while it magnifies the Author of all blessings, is thankful to his instruments; and deems it injustice to receive good tidings from heaven, and at the same time to disregard those who impart them.

The angel conceals his very name from Manoah. In some cases these heavenly messengers reveal themselves unasked; here entreaty will not prevail. The father of Samson shall conjecture from circumstances (he shall not be told in words) that One, whose name only is Jehovah, thus veiled his greatness and stood before him. "Why askest thou my name, seeing it is Wonderful?" The secret things belong to God—the things which are revealed, to us and our children. No words can be so significant as actions. Those of the angel tell best who he was—he did wonderfully. When the flame of the sacrifice arose towards heaven he ascended in the smoke of it, that Manoah might see to whom belonged the sacrifice and the messenger; and might know both how

to estimate the promise, and whence to expect the performance.

Manoah believed before, and asked for no sign; but that he might behold the confirmation of his hopes and the acceptance of his act of duty, the Angel of God vouchsafed to carry up the incense of his prayers to heaven. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. Where there are beginnings of faith, the mercy of God will add perfection.

Yet how did Manoah and his wife receive this manifestation from above? They had not spirit either to gaze at the departing angel, or even to look on each other. Instead of lifting up their eyes to heaven, they fall upon their faces to the ground—dazzled and overpowered with that which should have comforted them. What a proof do we afford of human infirmity, when we are afflicted with the causes of our joy?—when we conceive death in that glorious vision wherein our life and happiness consist? If such are the terrors of the saints of God, what will befall his enemies when, in the great day, they shall be summoned to his glorious tribunal?

The wife of Manoah first recovers her better judgment, and speaks peace and comfort to her husband. The argument is incontrovertible. "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering at our hands." God will not accept gifts where he intends punishment and professes hatred. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. If our oblation is not rejected, we may rely on his favor and protection. "If I incline unto wickedness in mine heart, the Lord will not hear me—but God *hath* heard me, and considered the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not cast out my prayer, nor turned his mercy from me!"

## 22.—SAMSON.

Of all the deliverers of Israel, none was so mighty, or so weak, as Samson. God, to show the inefficacy of human strength and human wisdom, permitted this his servant, as well as the royal Solomon, to be brought low under the tyranny of sin; that he who glorieth should glory in the Lord—that he who thinks his feet secure should take heed lest he fall.

When the *persuasions* (rather than the *arguments*) of Samson had obtained a reluctant consent from his parents to an unhallowed alliance, behold, in his way to Timnath a young lion, fierce, wild, hungry, rushed upon him: he had no weapon but his hand, no earthly refuge but his strength. God initiates his champions by previous encounters—Samson and David first fight with lions, then with Philistines; as He whom they prefigured engaged and vanquished the roaring lion in the wilderness before he entered on his public ministry. God never gives strength but he employs it. Persecution, shame, poverty, slander assail the christian in the outset of his course. It is a pledge of our future victories if we can say, "My soul hath been among lions." And do we think that God is angry, because we are called to these conflicts? Shall we repine at our own glory? Shall we expect the crown without the struggle? Can we be triumphant without resistance?

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson. The ravenous beast advances, rejoicing in his prey, his eyes sparkling with fury, and breathing death from his nostrils: he is rent as if he had been a kid—the destroyer is destroyed by an unarmed adversary. If God be for us, who can be against us? It is the right hand of the Lord which bringeth mighty things to pass.

The brave and modest Samson boasts not of this great

exploit. True courage and true virtue avoid ostentation. But who can sufficiently adore the goodness of God, by whom terror is changed into pleasure, and the greatest evils are made beneficial? Through his almighty power the curse itself is turned into a blessing. The bitterness of *death* is exchanged into the sweetness of *honey*.

Samson proceeds on his journey—the marriage is concluded; and he whom the lion could not conquer is overcome with the tears of a perfidious woman. “Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers,” is a wise and necessary caution. Favor is deceitful—riches are precarious—beauty is vain—but a woman that fears the Lord shall be praised. Wo be to him who is united with a Philistine! The betrayed and injured Samson revenges his own cause, and the cause of heaven, on his tyrannous oppressors. He knew that God had raised him to be a scourge to the Philistines; when the nuptial-feast terminated in slaughter, he was well aware that he fought the battles of the Almighty. Faith, courage, and the Divine assistance in a sore conflict gave him the victory.

The Israelites were slaves, and the Philistines their masters; yet the hand of God, which urged Samson to revenge, withholds the rage of these oppressors. Instead of requiting the death of their countrymen on the captive Israel, the Philistines demand only satisfaction from the person who had caused it.

Samson had drawn the sword for the sake of his country, as well as to avenge his private injuries; but now the men of Judah conspire with the Philistines to destroy him, and (fear prevailing over gratitude) are at once allies with their tyrants and traitors to their friend. He who has not experienced perils from false and ungrateful brethren, has not known the extreme of danger or of sorrow.

The men of Judah approach armed to the place of Samson's retreat. For a moment, perhaps, he expected from them assistance and support. Already he seemed to hear them saying, "We abhor the usurpation and tyranny of the Philistines—thou hast happily begun to shake off their yoke, and we are come to second thee with our best services—the valor of such a general makes our hearts beat high for conquest—under thy guidance we shall be honored, either in death or liberty." But who shall express the indignation of this champion of Israel, when he hears his kinsmen own themselves the abettors of barbarity and oppression? when they unblushingly require him to yield himself into their hands, that they might deliver him bound to the Philistines!

Samson might have attacked these thousands of Judah with as much advantage as he did the uncircumcised; but the blood of his countrymen was precious in his sight. With an acquiescence more noble than his former victories, he meekly offers his hands to their cords, that he might have the honor of a glorious deliverance. Thou, our better Nazarite, mightst have called on thy Father in the hour of thy betraying, and twelve legions of angels would have descended to thy rescue. But thou wouldst be bound that thou mightst triumph, and that we might learn of thee the instructive lesson, "that if we are not as ready to endure evil as to do good, we are not fit for the consecration of God."

With what triumph do the Philistines receive their illustrious captive! How ready are they to say, "Aha, so would we have it!" But the event soon turns their false joy into real sorrow. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall, I shall arise. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson—his bonds are as flax burned with fire. The countenance of his adversaries is changed, and their shouts are turned into shrieks; while, like the young lion whom he encountered, he flies upon his ene-

mies, and at the first onset sends a thousand Philistines to their graves. Thus didst thou, O blessed Savior, when thou wert bound with the cords of death, rouse thyself to victory and glory; thus didst thou vanquish all opposition, and lead captivity captive. Thus do thy saints, when they seem most forsaken, find thy Spirit mighty to their deliverance. Through God shall they do great acts, for it is he that shall tread down their enemies.

And now, after our wonder at the *strength* of Samson, how shall we, without grief and fear, contemplate his *weakness*? If thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme to mark what is amiss, O Lord, who shall abide it? How should we suspect ourselves, and maintain an incessant conflict with our deceitful lusts, when we behold the judge and deliverer of Israel betrayed, imprisoned, bereaved of his sight, derided of his enemies, forsaken by his God? And all this because repeated warnings failed of their success; because that heart which trembled not at thousands of the Philistines, was vanquished and enslaved by the treacherous Delilah!

Why do we not learn zeal of these idolaters? They thankfully ascribe to their Dagon the glory of Samson's captivity, and proclaim a solemn festival to their senseless image. "Our god hath delivered our enemy into our hands." O God, whatever may be the means of our success, thou only art its Author. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!

Once more the God of mercy looks on the repentant captive; and, while scorn is added to his misery, consents that his sun shall set in radiance. Even in the idolatrous temple, Samson, a laughing-stock to his enemies, the subject of their triumphant carousals, yet sees Him who is invisible. He sues to that God whom the heathen reproached and blasphemed, and once more



solicits to be strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit. Well knowing that his insulting enemies meant to crown their orgies by consigning him to an ignominious death, he collects all the forces of his soul and body to prevent and to punish their cruelty. God hears the prayer of his departing servant. Death and victory go hand in hand. He feels not his own dissolution while he dies with the Philistines. By the sacrifice of a life no longer serviceable to his country, he finishes his course with joy, and commends his exulting spirit into the hands of the God of Israel.

Thou, O blessed Savior, didst thus conquer in dying, and didst triumph when the malice of thine inhuman enemies had nailed thee to thy cross. Sin, death, hell had never been otherwise vanquished. All our life, our liberty, our glory is the fruit of thy passion. "We therefore pray thee, help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood."



### 23. — N A O M I .

Seldom were the rebellious Israelites without some Divine visitation, to teach them repentance and humility. The country, once flowing with milk and honey, is now overspread with penury; and Bethlehem, the house of bread, becomes a house of famine. A fruitful land God maketh barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.

The earth is the Lord's, and it is lawful for man to lepart from one region to another. Elimelech and his family remove, by reason of the famine, from Judah to Moab. The Creator and Governor of the world has not

confined his servants to one spot, at the hazard of wanting the necessaries of life. Neither pleasure, nor profit, nor curiosity takes the husband of Naomi from his country. *Necessity* compels him to seek in Moab the sustenance which he could not find in Israel.

How careful was Abraham to procure a wife of his own kindred for Isaac! How solemnly did Isaac enjoin the son of his love not to enter into affinity with the daughters of Canaan! The sons of Elimelech know no such restraints; soon do they form unhallowed alliances in the country of Moab. But the hand of death is upon them, and in the early bloom of youth they are summoned to the grave of their father. Their wives are widows—their mother childless and helpless among infidels. The miserable Naomi finds herself bereaved of her country, her husband, her children, her friends; and in solitude and wretchedness is constrained to struggle with an un pitying world.

Unto the godly there ariseth light in the darkness—from these shapeless ruins Jehovah raises comfort to his servant. She learns that God hath visited his people with bread. Elimelech, alas! is no more—her sons are in the tomb—she will make one effort to re-visit her kindred and the land of her nativity. Behold the advantages of the chastisement of God! While Naomi prospered she remained contented in Moab—adversity recalls her to her country. When our all-wise Corrector deprives us of earthly blessings we betake ourselves to heaven for refuge—our mind is directed *homeward*.

The widow of Elimelech had lost all except her fortitude and her trust in God. These yet remain, and support her in the stormy night of affliction. No dangers appal her, no difficulties tempt her to despair. Neither her age, nor her sex, nor her misfortunes divert her from the fixed resolution of her soul. When we are left comfortless in the midst of the Moab of this world, if we

would return to our better country, we must press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Goodness, even among infidels, will make itself friends. The daughters-in-law of Naomi are ready to forsake their kindred, their country, their parents for the society of one whose affinity died with her sons. Earnestly do they plead for their continuance with her, and they are solicitous to participate in those sorrows they are unable to remove.

Naomi is not insensible of the benefits which such well-trying affection would procure her, but her generous nature rejects comfort itself if it must be purchased by the distresses of others. She dissuades them from accompanying her in her poverty, with as much earnestness as if their presence had really been grievous and burdensome.

Orpah listens to the voice of disinterested love, and returns from a toilsome journey, to rest—from strangers, to her kindred—from despair, to contentment. A little entreaty will prevail on human nature to consult its own ease and convenience. None but a regenerate heart chooses rather to suffer adversity with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

The one sister takes an unwilling farewell, and returns in tears to her native home. The other knew how to estimate the value of Naomi. In comparison with her society she held in contempt whatever allurements could be found in Moab. "Entreat me not to depart—whither thou goest I will go—where thou dwellest I will dwell—thy people shall be my people—thy God my God—where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." Adversity is the true furnace of friendship. If love will not abide this fire it is counterfeit. Even in vain do we profess our faith in God himself, if we are not ready to suffer for him.

“Behold, thy sister is gone back to her people, and to her gods—return thou after her.” Beware, O christian, of such suggestions as these in thy spiritual journey! They have prevailed more with the world than all the powers of reason and argument. We think *that* either safe or pardonable for which we have a precedent. How many are undone because they follow a multitude to do evil, and have not courage to think and act for themselves! “Have any of the *rulers* or *Pharisees* believed?” The mind can never be steady till it is fixed on the firmest ground of assurance—till it can itself lead the way toward heaven—till it can say with Joshua, (whatsoever become of the world,) “I and my house will serve the Lord.”

Nothing can dissuade the widow of Mahlon from accomplishing the purpose of her heart. She arrives at Bethlehem, and without a sigh, without a murmur, partakes of the sorrows of that dear and honored friend, now no longer Naomi, but Marah, one experienced in sorrows—dead to all pleasures—alive only to bitterness.

Elimelech fled to Moab to avoid the famine; Boaz remained in Bethlehem, and continued rich and powerful. Yet though wealthy, he was not careless—he comes into the field to inspect the reapers. Frugality, if it degenerate not into avarice, enables us on just occasions to be liberal. He who wastes and disregards his substance can neither supply his own wants nor those of others.

Educated in the school of affliction, and called to penury by Him who at his pleasure divideth to every one as he will, Ruth goes forth to glean in the fields of Boaz. The Divine Providence which conducted her thither, gives her an early recompense for her love and duty to Naomi. From the reapers she experiences kindness—from their lord generosity, protection, friendship. Even this was a presage of her better estate. She returns wealthy with her ephah of barley, and blesses the libe-

rality of her benefactor. Wisely doth Naomi counsel her not to be seen in any other field while the harvest lasted. A grateful acceptance of favors is in some measure a requital of them. The God of heaven bestows on us his most precious gifts: O let us not desert him, nor turn to the world, which can only afford us vanity and vexation of spirit!

And now, secure in her daughter's innocence—in the uprightness of her own designs—in the simplicity of these primitive days—in the prudence and piety of her kinsman—Naomi dismisses Ruth to the threshing-floor of Boaz. The silence of the night, the festivity of the season, the improbability of discovery, the youth and beauty of the stranger, prevail not against the chastity of this servant of God. The progenitor of Him who was innocence itself blesses her as a father, encourages her as a friend, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away no less pure, and far more happy, enriched by his present bounty and by his promises of future kindness.

From the threshing-floor Boaz repairs to the gate, and assembles the elders of Bethlehem. The object of his love, destitute as she was of friends and fortune, had yet the best of all portions. "The city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Virtue, where it meets a heart that knows how to value it, is of far, far more estimation than thousands of gold and silver!

The legal impediments are removed—Ruth becomes the wife of Boaz. Her faith, her meekness, her piety meet with their merited and distinguished reward—Marah is once more Naomi—God hath turned her heaviness into joy, hath put off her sackcloth and girded her with gladness. How sure and how bountiful are his rewards! Who ever came under the shadow of his wings in vain? Who ever lost by trusting in him? Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at last rejoice in the exchange?

## 24.—THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL.

The house of God in Shiloh was often the resort of the pious Elkanah. Frequently he appeared there in his course of attendance as a descendant of Aaron—thrice a year with his sons—once, on the day of solemn annual sacrifice, with all his family. His office led him to assist at the oblations of others, but he would not withhold his own. He admonishes the people not to appear empty before their God, and what he enjoins he practices. Those who teach others ought ever to be examples to them in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

There is nothing more lovely than cheerfulness in the service of God. He whom God visits with his salvation fails not to rejoice in the gladness of his people, and to give thanks with his inheritance. The day of Elkanah's devotion is the day of his triumph. What earthly joy can so elevate the heart of man as the light of God's countenance and favor?

The childless Hannah finds in her festal portion a proof of her husband's love. It is the property of true mercy to regard the weakest; in our disappointments and sorrows we become especial objects of the indulgence of our God. He knows how to dispense his favors so as to give us cause both for humility and gratitude. Much is granted by our all-gracious Creator—something he yet leaves us to desire. Were it not so, mankind would be too haughty or too miserable.

But the love of Elkanah, thus wisely and well bestowed, causes the matron to endure the persecution and taunts of her envious rival. Peninnah, surrounded by her youthful offspring, cannot taste happiness but at the price of another's misery. A good heart, while it enjoys the blessing of God, can pity those that want;

while envy produces only one benefit, that the sin of others teaches us patience and charity. On the return of each solemnity was Hannah made the victim of jealousy and scorn—every year was she disturbed in her sacrifice and at her devotions. Amidst their festivity her cup was bitterness—she mingled her drink with weeping. Yet the husband of this afflicted mourner endeavored, with unremitted tenderness, to assuage her sorrows. "Why weepest thou? Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" It is the too common weakness of the feeling heart to give such advantage to an enemy. What would malice require, but the distress of those it persecutes? In so doing we delight our adversary—we betray our own cause—we burn incense on the altar of envy—we bring on ourselves aggravated wrongs. Under such trials as these our best security is to possess our souls in patience. Anger is then disgraced and defeated; the envenomed weapons fall harmless at the feet of those who would fasten them in our bosoms.

The comfort which she cannot find in the persuasions of her husband, Hannah seeks in the mercy of heaven. She rises from the feast—she repairs to the temple of God—she pours out her complaint before him—she shows before him her trouble. Whatever be the affliction, here is the remedy. In the worst of calamities, prayer is yet the christian's resource; when all other help fails him *this* remains, and, while he has a heart, comforts it.

The grief of Hannah adds fervor to her devotion; she weeps, she prays, she vows. If God will grant her a son, she will consecrate the precious gift to the Giver. If his birth shall make him a Levite, her still more solemn dedication shall make him a Nazarite; and even his minority shall be devoted to the temple. If we would obtain any benefit, let us ask it of God with a reference to his glory, and we shall not solicit in vain.

The prayers of this afflicted servant of God, at the moment of their utterance, are strangely misconstrued by his priest. Her grief, her devotion, the humility of her demeanor protect her not from an unkind and rashly-formed suspicion. Eli taxes her with intemperance.

Inured to reproaches, she answers in all the meekness and serenity of conscious innocence; and, without entering into a clamorous expostulation, professes herself to be no daughter of Belial, but a woman troubled in spirit. Eli sees his error and recants it; and, to make amends for his unjust censure, dismisses her with his blessings and his prayers.

She began her devotions in sorrow—she concludes them in thankfulness and joy. Great is the peace of that heart which has unburdened its cares, and addresses its fervent supplications to God. The prayer of faith is no sooner made on earth than it is heard in heaven. When we have sought unto God in our distress, we shall obtain either relief or patience.

The sacrifice is ended. Elkanah and his family rise up to return to Ramah. Blessed is she that believeth, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. The son of his mother's prayers, in his very name, shall acknowledge the mercy which gave him being, and the vow which consecrated him to heaven.

When the appointed time returns, the father of Samuel calls his family to their holy journey—bids them prepare for their anniversary sacrifice, when their feet shall stand within the gates of the sanctuary. The success of those prayers which Hannah had offered up in the house of God now detains her at home. The charge of her infant is a temporary obstacle to devotions, which shall afterwards be paid with increase of gratitude and love. That soul is cold and indifferent to religion which on idle and needless pretences absents itself from the



service of God. Necessary works of charity alone afford a dispensation. The world is then his temple, and whatsoever we do becomes an act of devotion.

At last, when her child is weaned, she goes up and pays that vow which she promised with her lips and spake with her heart when she was in her affliction. Never did she go up to worship with so joyful a heart as now, when she offers to God that precious gift which his goodness bestowed and her grateful piety returns. Nor does she only present her son, but brings with him sacrifices more costly and more numerous than the law of God enjoins. She deems all this too little to express her thankfulness for the mercy which remembered and the power which removed her sorrows. If our hearts are truly sensible of the loving-kindness of God, we shall rejoice in the tribute of praise more than in the benefits themselves which we acknowledge. We shall be as anxious to show our humble and fervent affections as to attain the object of our wishes. We shall not rest till we have attempted to discharge (how feebly and imperfectly soever) our debt of gratitude.

The obligation of a secret vow is no less than if it had been made before ten thousand witnesses. The promise, whereby the mother of Samuel devoted him to God, was uttered in solemn silence. It was enough that her own heart knew it, and God, who is greater than the heart. "For this child I prayed—now therefore I have given him unto the Lord."

Eli beholds with joy the fruit of those prayers to which his own blessing had given a sanction—he now receives the matron, not with suspicion, but with affectionate welcome. His heart is moved. The proof which was afforded of the mercy of God and the grateful fidelity of his handmaid, called him to his knees: he worshipped the Lord. In vain do we contemplate the goodness of our heavenly Father and the virtues of our

christian brethren, if we do not glorify God for his mercy to *others* as well as to *ourselves*.

The happy mother returns, enriched with the blessings of God and of his servant. That piety, which devoted her only child to heaven, does not fail of its reward. The gift is recompensed with a lavish hand. A numerous offspring repay her for that one, who was no less hers because he was God's. No longer is she the subject of indignity and scorn—no longer is she ashamed when she speaketh with her enemies in the gate. She blesses Him who maketh the barren woman to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children.

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#### 25.—E L I .

The sons of Eli are as profligate as their father is holy. Had example or education the power of entailing virtue, we should not behold the consecrated vestments profaned by the crimes of Hophni and of Phinehas. But, alas, in these ministers of God, these attendants at his sacred altar, we see nothing but monsters of impiety, sacrilege and lust. When such as these are degenerate, their wickedness is above all others, as their office is more eminently sacred. An abandoned *priest* is the greatest criminal upon earth.

Thus that altar, which expiated the sins of the people, added to those of the descendants of Aaron. But while the altar sanctified not its ministers, their want of sanctity deprived not the offering of its efficacy. The depravity of the priest is his own—the comfort of the ordinance is from God. The ministers of religion may show the path to heaven by their voice, while their feet

walk in the way toward destruction. A sacerdotal habit may enclose a heart full of all subtlety and mischief—and he whose doctrine tends to bring salvation to others, must take heed to himself, or he will be a cast-away.

Unjustly, therefore, did the people abhor the offering of the Lord because of the impiety of his ministers. It is dangerous not to distinguish between the work and the agent. If we are offended with our God because offence cometh from man, we charge our Maker foolishly, and are deservedly the objects of his displeasure.

All Israel exclaimed at the flagitious conduct of Eli's children. If their father knew it not, his ignorance was criminal—nothing but age can plead in his excuse, that his voice was not *first* heard in rebuking the offenders; but now, when his eyes can no longer be closed against the truth, his admonitions are so gentle, his partiality so notorious, that whether as a father, a high priest, or a judge, he sacrifices his acknowledged duty to the feelings of misplaced indulgence. He forbore not to reprove the mother of Samuel with severity, on the bare *suspicion* of a fault; but the notorious villany of Hophni and Phinehas shall pass unnoticed, or be commented on in such a manner as to meet with countenance rather than discouragement. "Nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear." Was this an adequate censure, was this a just punishment for those who were guilty of such flagrant offences? of rapine—of adultery—of profanation?

But while human authority thus sleeps, the justice of God is awake. Eli shall learn that his imprudent tenderness towards his offspring was barbarity in the extreme. The sentence is gone forth. "He shall see his enemy in the habitation of the Lord—his sons shall be cut off in one day—the honor of the priesthood shall be taken from his house—his posterity shall make humble

application to his successors for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread.”

The lights of the temple were dim and ready to give place to morning, when God called Samuel to denounce his indignation against the offenders. Unaccustomed as yet to the heavenly voice, and mistaking it for that of Eli, the youth repairs to his master and demands his pleasure—while the high-priest, as better acquainted with the ways of heaven, attributes to God those accents which himself heard not. He is a more careful *guardian* than a *father*—he teaches Samuel what he shall answer: “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!”

Several years had Samuel ministered before the Lord—never till now had he been addressed in person. Lo, the first words miraculously imparted to him are demonstrations of terror and vengeance. God begins to prepare the hearts of his servants with holy fear; he makes those sensible of his greatness whom he calls to be eminent instruments of his glory.

The conscience of the high-priest whispered to him that the Divine message concerned himself—sin needs no vision to assure it of punishment. A mind thus disturbed forebodes terrible things; and though it cannot single out the judgment allotted to it, is yet in a confused expectation of some tremendous evil. Poverty, death, desolation to himself and his offspring, was denounced from the God he had offended. Eli receives the dreadful sentence with unmoved patience and humble submission. “It is the Lord—let him do what seemeth him good.” O admirable faith, and more than human resolution! Constancy, worthy of the venerable priest of Jehovah, worthy of a heart sacrificed to heaven! However culpable with respect to his sons, he is dutiful to God; and meekly resigns himself to the good pleasure of the Almighty. “*It is the Lord*, whom I have ever found holy, and just, and gracious. *Let him do*

*what seemeth him good*—for whatever seemeth him good cannot be otherwise than good, however it may seem to me!” Every man can receive the *blessings* of heaven with complacency—but to bow the knee in adoration to our Creator when he visits us in indignation, this, this is peculiar only to the faithful!

The scandal was public; so must be the punishment. Repentance prevents the *eternal* displeasure of God—but it may be necessary both for the sinner and for mankind that the *temporal* judgment take its course. Be it our care, and the subject of our earnest prayers to the Almighty, that what cannot be averted may at least be sanctified! The exhortation speaketh unto us as unto children, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” The venerable Eli must drink of the same cup with the wise and beloved Solomon. “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. If he commit iniquity I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men—but my mercy shall not depart away from him for ever.”

The presumption of Israel gave early opportunity for the infliction of that sentence denounced against the sons of Eli. The people are smitten before their enemies—they send for the ark of God into the field. Who gave them such authority? Not Eli—not Samuel—not the God of Samuel. The rashness of the elders, the superstition of the populace, which flourished amidst the decline of true piety, caused this impious profanation. When the ark is brought into the host Israel fills the heaven and shakes the earth with acclamations. Hypocrites rest all their hopes in the *externals* of religion, and regard not the soul and substance of it, whence only they can obtain salvation and

peace. But God will not become the minister of sin—rather shall his own ark fall into the hands of the Philistines than he will give countenance to the madness of the people. Israel is discomfited—the ark, which had been brought into contempt, is carried into captivity—and the authors of this complicated mischief are justly cut off in their sin.

The messenger who ran from the host, filled the city with cries—they reach the ears of Eli. The good old man, after ninety-eight years, still sits in the judgment-seat as one who never thought himself too aged to do God service. He hears the news of Israel's defeat, of the death of his sons, with sorrow and yet with patience—but when he is told that the ark of God is taken, he can live no longer—the word strikes him down from his throne, and lays his grey head in the dust. Not outward magnificence, not state, not wealth, not favor, but the presence of Jehovah is the preservation of his Church; when this is gone the glory is departed from Israel. O worse than no people, more miserable than the very heathen! Philistines depart in triumph with the ark and victory. The scattered remnant of Israel behold with horror that their iniquities have separated between them and their God.

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## 26.—SAUL ANOINTED.

Early did Samuel begin his acquaintance with God, and he continued it to his grey hairs. If we are faithful to our heavenly Master, our age endears us to him the more. When the shadows of the evening are stretched out and the day is declining upon us, He who hath made

and sustained us hitherto, will continue still to support and deliver us.

Had the sons of Samuel resembled their parent, Israel had not so earnestly desired a king—but these youthful judges walk not in the ways of their father—they accept bribes—they pervert judgment. The Hebrews are clamorous for a new form of government; and God, whose ancient purpose it was to raise up a king to Israel, thinks fit to listen to their importunity. The prophet applies to heaven for direction, and He by whom kings reign undertakes to appoint the sovereign of his people.

The father of Saul was distinguished amidst the tribe of Benjamin—his son was graceful and majestic in person, and as yet uncorrupted in mind. The providence of God brings this youth to the place of Samuel's abode—he comes on the festal day of sacrifice—he comes, and he finds the prophet prepared for his reception. God had already foretold his arrival: already he had commanded Samuel to anoint him king over Israel.

How kindly is Saul received and entertained by Samuel, whose present dignity was to be eclipsed by the royalty of his youthful guest! Instead of envying his successor's greatness, instead of looking unkindly on the man who should deprive him of his authority, he welcomes him to his house, bids him to the feast, honors him with the chief seat, and forbears not to intimate his approaching dignity: "On whom is the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on thy father's house?"

Amazed at so strange a salutation, Saul modestly declines this unexpected and unmerited homage—justly represents his tribe as the least of Israel, and meekly deems himself the meanest of his family. Benjamin had not yet recovered from its almost universal slaughter—yet from this remnant of a tribe God selects a prince for his people—on these desolate ruins he raises a

throne. It was doubtless in sincerity that Saul thus humbled himself before the prophet of God—his beginning promised happiness to himself and to Israel, but true grace was not in him—he bare not fruit in age. Blessed is he that endureth unto the end—for he shall be saved.

At length Samuel unveils to the astonished youth the whole counsel of God—he bestows the oil of regal consecration on his head, the kiss of homage on his cheek, and sends him away rich in joyful expectation. And now, lest his amazement should end in distrust, he gives him a proof of his intelligence with heaven, by foretelling those events which should befall him on his return; he shows him whom he shall meet, what they shall say, how himself shall be affected. Every word prepares him for his approaching coronation. No sooner was Saul departed from the presence of Samuel than God gave him another spirit, raised his thoughts and dispositions to the height of royalty, prepared his head and his heart for the diadem, and taught him how to represent himself, and supply the place of God to his people.

After partaking in the defeat and confusion of their idol, after experiencing the terror of God's avenging thunders, the Philistines had long refrained from hostilities against Israel; but other enemies were in their borders; and Nahash with his Ammonites was at their gates. The commencement of Saul's reign is a season of war and tumult. The anointed king shrinks from a task so full of difficulty and danger, till the God who had chosen him brings him forth to the light, offers him to the applause and admiration of his people.

Now the people shout for joy; they behold the sovereign whom they had anxiously desired; they behold his majestic person, his royal demeanor, and they entertain the most flattering presages of happiness under



his protection. Samuel, who had ceased to be their judge, was yet their prophet; in this moment of transport he instructs both king and people in their mutual duties; he writes them in a book, he lays it up before the Lord. The most powerful monarch is still under subjection to the laws of heaven. If he transgress these he is accountable to One who is higher than the highest, King of kings and Lord of lords. Equally anxious for the welfare of the prince and people, Samuel teaches the former justice and moderation, the latter obedience and loyalty. Whoever disseminates other doctrines, does his utmost to effect the ruin of the community, and is the adversary of God and man.

There was never yet virtue so perfect as to escape detraction. Amidst the rejoicings of Israel at the inauguration of Saul, murmurs of dissatisfaction were uttered by the seditious. They well knew that Saul had been raised to his dignity by the immediate appointment of God—that he sought it not—that he coveted it not—that he modestly retired from the exercise of it. The honor of his family, the beauty of his person, the privilege of his Divine authority, the praises bestowed on him by Samuel, could not protect him from obloquy; even merit and virtue afford sufficient ground for envy in the soul of the wicked. In such cases a man's comfort arises from himself; from the conscious rectitude of his heart.

The armies of Nahash approach, the danger grows more and more imminent, and the news of Gilead's distress fills all Israel with affliction. The people are in tears; Saul is moved with ardor rather than sorrow. God, who had before given him the spirit of prophecy, now bestows on him a spirit of fortitude: now he proves himself worthy of a throne, worthy to be the prince and captain of his people. He undertakes and accomplishes the deliverance of Gilead; assembles Israel, leads them

to the field, raises the siege, puts the enemy to flight, brings peace and victory to his country.

The grateful Israelites now inquire who *they* were whose voices had refused allegiance to such a leader. "Bring forth these men, that we may slay them." The crime of these men was the same, had Saul been *defeated* in Gilead; but now his triumph animates the hearts of his people, and teaches them to call down instant vengeance on the head of his enemies. The king himself, who had been injured most deeply, prevents its execution. He will not have any interruption to the general joy. No blood shall flow by the hand of Israel but that of the invaders. "There shall no man die this day; for this day the Lord hath saved his people."

How nobly was the beginning of Saul's reign adorned with every royal virtue—with wisdom, valor and clemency! His prophecies showed him to be miraculously wise; his battle and victory bore witness to his courage; his pardon of these rebels demonstrated his mercy. He who had conquered the Ammonites was now triumphant in a severer conflict; he overcame the emotions of anger and resentment; he knew when to draw the sword and when to let it rest harmless in the scabbard. He who is slow to anger is greater than the mighty; and he who ruleth his spirit, than he who taketh or rescueth a city. Now the Israelites see they have a king who can both *shed* blood and *spare* it. His gentleness gains those whom even his valor had not won to loyalty. Had he but continued as he began, David had remained in the peaceful obscurity of his pastoral life. Mercy and justice are inseparable in God; they should dwell conjointly in the hearts of kings. Wheresoever they are severed, government falls into distraction, and terminates in ruin.

## 27.—SAMUEL AND DAVID.

To declare the end from the beginning is solely the prerogative of infinite wisdom. In the commencement of Saul's reign he was renowned for courage, justice, and mercy; in its progress he proved to be a sacrilegious tyrant and a rebel against God. Samuel mourns for him, who was too obdurate to mourn for himself. The defection of Saul brings tears into the eyes of the aged prophet. Had one spark of ambition lurked in his heart, he had rejoiced at the misconduct of his rival—but his heart was the seat of nobler passions. It grieves him to see the plant so soon withered which he had raised to such distinguished honor in the garden of Israel. He weeps, and he retires to Ramah—he will no longer be a witness of enormities which he can neither prevent nor remedy. He will not countenance that man with his presence, on whom he sees God frown.

The Almighty does not *blame* this sorrow, but *moderates* it. "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" Those tears which flow justly for his sin, must cease, because of his rejection. A good heart relies on the justice of God's decrees, and forgets all earthly prepossessions, while it has respect to heaven. God will not bereave his children of a king, but will bestow on them one more worthy. Virtue and sovereignty shall be united—Jehovah himself shall rule by the ministry of his chosen servant. Happy are the people who are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.

The prophet receives a commission to repair to Bethlehem. He carries with him, not a sceptre, in token of dominion, but the holy oil, to indicate Divine consecration. He is directed to the house of Jesse, the descendant of Ruth the Moabitess. Her faith and piety made

her worthy to become the parent of kings. The retributions of God are ever bountiful, and exceed our utmost deservings. The just man walketh in his integrity—his children are blessed after him.

The policy is not unlawful which eludes the suspicion of a jealous tyrant. Samuel takes a heifer with him for sacrifice. There was no place, no time wherein it was not fit for the descendant of Aaron to offer peace-offerings unto God; but when a king was to be anointed, it was an act, not merely of devotion, but of necessity. The authority which is derived from God must be consecrated by public solemnities; every important action requires a sacrifice to bless it, much more that on which depends the welfare of a church and nation.

The elders of Bethlehem conjectured, not without reason, that matters of highest import had drawn the prophet from his retirement. They feared lest some root of wickedness, springing up amongst them, had given occasion for the arrival of this unexpected guest. They welcome him with trembling, not on his account, but their own. "Comest thou peaceably?" It is a good thing to revere the messengers of God, and to expect their admonitions with awe. The elders rejoice to hear of no other errand than a sacrifice—they hasten to prepare themselves for the pious solemnity. We must not presume to sacrifice unto God if we are not sanctified. Unrepented sin, lurking in the heart, renders our devotions ineffectual, and the prayer of the hypocrite is abomination, because he profanes that which should be holy.

All the citizens sanctify themselves; but Jesse and his sons are more especially sanctified by Samuel. Interesting as his errand was to all Israel, it was peculiarly so to this distinguished family. With what anxiety did Samuel look on the sons of Jesse, that he might see the

face of the man whom God had chosen! And now, when the eldest son came forth, a youth whose beauty was not inferior to that of Saul, he imagines the choice soon made, and the first impulse of his heart is to pour the consecrated oil on the head of Eliab. "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." The best judgment is subject to deceit—the holiest prophet falls into error if he waits not for the direction of God.

That which should have *forewarned* Samuel, *deceives* him. He had seen these very hopes once frustrated, and yet his eye suggests to him that Eliab was appointed to rule. But what saith the answer of God unto him? "Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him—for God seeth not as man seeth." The king whom he will choose shall owe his advancement not to his person, but to his heart. Seven sons of Jesse are presented to the prophet—no one is omitted whom their father thought worthy of honor. If Samuel or Jesse had chosen, David had never been king—yet behold him summoned from the fold, and by the choice of God destined to the throne! Even a father's partiality could not suggest aught to Jesse which might induce him to offer David as a candidate for honors—yet him hath God fixed on to rule.

The countenance of David was fair and ingenuous—but he was left with the sheep while his brethren were at the sacrifice. Modest and simple in his demeanor, he was judged unfit for royal dignity. The purport of this consecration, though probably explained to Jesse, was doubtless concealed from his children. They understood not, or believed not what God would do with their brother. They saw him endued with spiritual gifts, but knew not whither they tended. David returns to his sheep, and in humble submission to the will of God resigns himself to the disposition of those hands which had chosen him—when suddenly a messenger is

sent from Saul to call him in all haste to that court of which he should afterwards be master. The occasion is from God as well as the event.

That the *kingdom* is departed from Saul is his least misfortune. The Spirit of God departs also from him. His soul droops in melancholy dejection, or raves with tumultuous frenzy. His courtiers have recourse to an expedient, innocent at least, if not fully efficacious, to allay the tempest of his passions. They call in the assistance of music—they fly for aid to the harp of the son of Jesse.

David, from the time of his consecration, had lived in the same peaceful retirement as before—his only care, his only ambition was to promote the welfare of his flock. But the wisdom of God finds occasion to bring him on that theatre where he was to shine with unrivalled lustre. However he is neglected by his brethren, the acts of his youthful prowess against the tyrants of the desert are rehearsed—the fame of his virtues and accomplishments is not buried in obscurity. That skill, which had for its object no more than the recreation of a pastoral life, shall now introduce him into the presence of his afflicted sovereign.

Doubtless the father of David noted these things, and pondered them in his heart. He could not but behold the wonderful interposition of Divine Providence, by which the youth, who was brought from the field to be anointed, was summoned thence as unexpectedly to the palace of Saul. Now he perceived that God was preparing for the accomplishment of his promise; and he awaited the issue in joyful expectation.

No sooner is David in the presence of Saul than he obtains the royal favor. The Giver of all grace has ordained that even wicked men should honor the virtues which they will not imitate. The harp of David chases away the melancholy of his lord—the psalms which he

sung to it sooth his frantic despair. To this day their efficacy is undiminished. Our hymns and spiritual songs are adverse to the powers of darkness, and rejoice the blessed angels of heaven, who sing their hallelujahs in the choir of glory. "It came to pass, when the evil spirit was upon Saul, that David took a harp and played with his hand; and Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

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### 28.—DAVID AND GOLIATH.

The harp of David has chased the evil spirit from Saul, and the youth has again leisure to retire to Bethlehem. The splendor of a court is less dear to him than the solitudes of the wilderness. A good heart frames itself to all conditions, and however outward circumstances vary, is still the same. Worldly minds rise without difficulty, but cannot descend from their elevation with patience or with safety.

There he remains amidst his flocks till God calls him into the field of battle. Forty days had Goliath defied the armies of Israel. Where was the courage of him who once slew his thousands?—of him, who once indignantly asked, "What aileth the people, that they weep?"—of him, whose own gigantic stature made him no unequal competitor to the Philistine? The spirit of God is the spirit of fortitude—of *that* Saul's disobedience had deprived him—it was transferred, with the prophet's blessing, to his rival.

Scarcely has David saluted his brethren, when the proud champion steps forward before his troops and renews his insolent challenge against Israel. David

sees him, hears his defiance, and wonders that all faces turn pale at his approach. The youth is filled with shame and amazement at the pusillanimity of his countrymen—who, while they fly from Goliath, speak of the reward which should be consequent on a victory they dare not undertake. Alas, how many, who yield *themselves* an easy prey to their spiritual adversaries, can descant on the glory reserved in heaven for the faithful!

Those difficulties which appal faint hearts serve to animate an heroic mind. David is ready to encounter this mighty warrior, because no one else dares behold him. While he hears the proud boast of the challenger his eyes sparkle with indignation, his heart beats with generous disdain. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

The envious heart of Eliab considers this holy courage as a reflection on himself. "Is it for thee, proud idle boy, to interfere with affairs of war? Is yonder champion a fit antagonist for thee? What dost thou think of thyself or of us? Go to thy sheep, and look not in the face of Goliath. The wilderness becomes thee, and not the field, unequal as thou art to any here, save only in arrogance and presumption. The pastures of Bethlehem could not detain thee; thou must come down to see the battle. I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart. This was thy thought—*There is no glory to be obtained amidst the sheep-folds; I will seek it in arms. My brethren are winning honor amidst the troops of Israel, while I am basely tending my flocks. Why should not I endeavor to obtain distinction as well as they?* This vanity makes the shepherd a soldier, and the soldier a champion! Depart, rash stripping, to thy crook and to thy harp; and leave swords and spears for those who know how to use them!"

David, ere he engages in other conflicts, first over-



comes himself, and then his brother—himself, in his patient forbearance—his brother, in the mildness of his answer, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" It was not time to return railing for railing, when the swords of the Philistines were drawn, and Goliath was defying the armies of Israel. Surely this triumph was more difficult and more glorious than that which followed. That man is fit to fight the battles of the Lord who has learned to be victor over his passions.

The fire of David's zeal is not to be thus extinguished. His courage, which meets with scorn at the hands of a brother, finds applause amidst unprejudiced hearts. The rumor flies to the ears of the king, that a youth is found who is desirous of encountering the Philistine. David is brought into the presence of Saul. Alas, that ungrateful prince has already forgotten not only his services but his person! and now, when he beholds the young and ruddy shepherd, and hears him offer to enter the lists with Goliath, he receives him with a contemptuous pity, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for thou art but a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth."

All this cannot weaken that heart which has received its strength from faith. David must justify that courage to Saul which he is eager to prove against Goliath. He modestly recites the past transactions of his life in support of his more ambitious pretensions. "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." He knew that the presumption of Goliath would be the cause of his destruction—he knew that holiness was an invincible shield to the faithful. He had already experienced the blessing of God's assistance, and he relied on him for his continued favor.

Resolution thus grounded makes even Saul himself

confident. David has both his consent and blessing. He comes to Saul as a shepherd—he shall go towards Goliath as a warrior. The king's own armor is not too rich for one who shall fight for his country. But what avails the splendor of Saul's coat of mail if it is not adapted to David? The honor is only an encumbrance—danger would ensue instead of security. The son of Jesse declines the glittering burden; his staff, his scrip, his sling, five smooth stones out of the brook, are fitter for his purpose than royal panoply. A time shall come, when David, invested with all the honors of Saul, shall find them still a burden—heavy, but not to be relinquished, because committed to him by God. If we envy the dignity of others, it is through ignorance of the anxious cares by which that dignity is accompanied. Could we feel their weight, even for a moment, we should return to a less exalted station with joy and thankfulness.

Goliath, armed with his sword, and shield, and spear, advances into the field. When David appears in the lists with such an adversary, the eyes of Israel and of the Philistines are fastened on him. His countrymen behold him with anxiety and compassion. "Alas, is that stripping to contend against so mighty a foe? Is he sent unarmed to such a contest? Is the honor of Israel entrusted to such hands as these?" The Philistines, especially their champion, look on him with the utmost scorn and insult. "Am I a dog, that thou comest against me with staves? Come hither, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the heaven and to the beasts of the field."

Presumption is both the *presage* and the *cause* of ruin. An avenging God, by the arm of David, shall bring to nought the arrogance of the unbelievers. Goliath shall learn too late, how formidable that enemy is who goeth forth in the strength of the Lord God, who abideth under the shadow of the Almighty. David runs toward the

Philistine, and, full of the hopes of victory, directs the stone against his vast forehead. God was not unmindful of his servant. He showed strength with his arm: he cast down the proud in the imagination of his heart. There lies the great defier of Israel, gasping in the pangs of death, and biting the earth with shame and indignation that he falls by the hand of a shepherd. So shall all thine adversaries perish, O Lord!

O thou, who canst arm the weak against the mighty, wherefore should we be afraid of man that shall die, and the son of man who shall be as grass, and forget thee, our refuge and strength, our present help in trouble? Wherefore should we fear in the day of adversity, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? Thou, even thou art He that comforteth, defendeth, fighteth for us—and where is the fury of the oppressor?

Thou turnest the face of the wicked against themselves—thou makest thine enemies the instruments of their own destruction. The sword of *Goliath*, in the hand of David, avenges the honor of God and brings victory and glory to Israel.

When the generations of men fled away in terror from the powers of darkness, thou, O Savior, didst undertake our cause alone—thou, O Son of David, by thy death destroying death, didst overcome the enemy with his own weapons. Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; he hath ransomed us; he hath delivered us from the grave. He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him.

## 29.—THE DEATH OF SAUL.

What a striking difference do we behold in the history of individuals and of nations, as it pleases Divine justice to prosper or to punish! When the Philistines set themselves in array against God a stripling can be the occasion of their discomfiture—when they fight the Lord's battles, by arming against sacrilegious tyranny, the presence of a powerful monarch, or even of the ark itself, gives no security to Israel. Then "the Lord breaketh in pieces the staff of the ungodly and the sceptre of the rulers. The man who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, the oppressor, who ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth."

The prediction of Endor had almost slain Saul before the battle. He had forsaken the Lord—he had held communion with demons—he had received his last morsel at the hand of a sorceress—and now necessity draws him into that field where he sees nothing but death and despair. The prophecy of the counterfeit Samuel sunk into the heart of the apostate monarch. Those fatal words have already stricken him to the ground. He expects, in horror and consternation, the doom which, however denounced, he is too conscious of having deserved. While the mind is uncertain of success, it relieves itself by the probability of good—even in less promising circumstances, there is some mixture of hope. Thus far the spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear? Not a ray of light penetrates through the gloom—the waters overwhelm the despairing sufferer, and the stream goeth over his soul. The wages of sin is death; while the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is probable that the same moment saw David victorious over the Amalekites, and Saul defeated by the

Philistines. David consulted with God, and prevailed—Saul with the powers of darkness, and perished. The effect is proportionate to its cause—the end corresponds with the means which led to it. “I call heaven and earth to record against you,” saith the voice of God, “that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Have I any pleasure at all in the death of him that dieth?”

The slaughter of Saul and of his sons did not take place in the commencement of this tragedy—these sad events were reserved for its awful close. First, the people fly, and fall down wounded on Mount Gilboa—next, the sons of Saul are numbered with the slain. Death knows no partial distinctions—even Jonathan himself is involved in the common destruction. If valor, if holiness, if sincerity of heart could have averted the fatal blow, Jonathan would have survived—the son of Saul would have lived to share in the prosperity of the son of Jesse—to rejoice in his possession of a throne to which himself made no pretensions, the rival of David only in friendship and in virtue. God willed it otherwise—he had brighter rewards in store for that illustrious youth than an earthly diadem. The arrows of the Philistines dismiss the royal Jonathan to a more exceeding weight of glory than that which he relinquished to the brother of his love.

Meanwhile the miserable Saul beholds his legions scattered, his children lifeless, his enemies triumphant, his honor prostrate in the dust. Wounded in body and desperate in mind, he sees nothing before him but agony and death—and now, destitute of all hope, he requests that blow at the hand of his armor-bearer which his indignant spirit disdained to receive from a Philistine. He asks, but he is denied—no entreaty, no extremity can move the arm of that faithful servant against his lord. Had the unhappy monarch shunned the reality

of sin as carefully as the appearance of dishonor, his sun had never set in blood—he had neither lived nor died a murderer.

What a faithful servant refuses to execute, his own rash hand shall accomplish. Wicked men regard the censure of the world more than the peril of their own souls. What if Saul had died by the hand of a Philistine? Jonathan his son did so—and yet he died with glory. The carnal heart fixes an idea of shame to what is in itself either innocent or indifferent; and for the sake of idle popularity scruples not to commit actions prejudicial to dearer and better interests.

Now is the blood of the innocent priests and the meditated slaughter of David required at the hands of the tyrant. From the beginning of his defection to this last act of violence he was an enemy to himself and to his God. His death corresponds with his life—his own arm pays him the reward of all his wickedness.

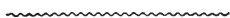
As yet his spirit lingers, and seems reluctant to depart from its earthly associate. His armor-bearer has more successfully imitated the desperate act of his lord, and is no more. Saul yet breathes, and drinks to the dregs the cup of fury. Chance brings an Amalekite to the scene of his sufferings—and he, who had been once called and anointed by God, the pride and hope of Israel, the terror of their enemies, the conqueror of Ammon, Amalek and Philistia, receives his last blow, at his own impassioned request, from a wayfaring stranger. "Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found—he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more, neither shall his place any more be

hold him. He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through. It is drawn, and cometh out of his body, yea, the glittering sword passeth through his heart. Terrors are upon him. The heavens shall reveal his iniquity, and the earth shall rise up against him. This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed him by the Almighty."

Common rumor had already fixed on David as the anointed heir to the kingdom of Israel—to be the first bearer of news so grateful as the death of Saul—to lay the ensigns of royalty at the feet of his successor—to be entitled to the reward, not merely of a messenger of glad tidings, but of one whose hand, in destroying a tyrant, had done good service to the state: what splendid prospects for an Amalekite! "I am the man to whom David owes his kingdom, I am the author of his deliverance and his happiness." A mind wherein self-love rules with absolute dominion, is unable to comprehend the emotions of a generous heart.

How is this alien disappointed of his hopes, when he finds his tidings the occasion of fasting, and weeping, and mourning! when that voice, half stifled with tears, calls him to account for the murder, instead of acknowledging his merits! Doubtless the stranger pleaded for himself with fair plausible arguments. "Alas, Saul was already fallen upon his own spear—it was mercy to shorten his sufferings—his importunate prayers moved me to hasten his approach to the gates of death. Had I stricken him as an enemy, I had perhaps deserved the censure, but the blow was that of a friend. Why am I regarded with horror for obeying the voice of a king? for perfecting what himself had begun, but could not finish? If neither his own wound or mine had dispatched him, the Philistines were at hand, ready to do that with insult which I did in favor. Had not my arm anticipated theirs, where had been the crown

of Israel which I have presented to thee? I could have delivered it to Achish, king of the Philistines, and have been rewarded with honor. Let me not die for an act well meant to thee, however unkindly misinterpreted!" But all these excuses avail not to his deliverance. "Thy blood be upon thine own head, for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed. Every drop of royal blood is sacred, and he who sheds it is accursed of God and man." Of how different a spirit from this of David are those men who suborn the death of princes, and justify the atrocious act, and celebrate and canonize their murderers! "O my soul, come not thou into their secret—unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united!"



### 30.—NATHAN AND DAVID.

With what terror and amazement, O God, do we contemplate the transgression of thine anointed servant? What an universal example doth his sin and his repentance afford to mankind! What an awful, instructive lesson, that we should never be led astray by presumption or despair! *Both* are excluded by the crime and by the contrition of David. When we see so great a saint thus fallen, thus risen, we cannot but be sensible of our own infirmities, and the transcendent mercy of our God.

Now the king of Israel is in undisturbed possession of his dear-bought spouse. The brave and faithful Uriah lives no longer. The splendor of royalty has soon dried up the tears of his perfidious widow. But the just and holy God will not suffer his name to be thus profaned



among his people—he will not have occasion given to his enemies to blaspheme, without severely punishing the offender. As that offender is more dear to him, the sin becomes more heinous, more aggravated. David, who has been lost in a lethargy of guilt, shall be suddenly awakened by the terrors of the Lord.

If any superiority of condition could have afforded a privilege from sin, the angels had not transgressed in heaven, nor Adam in paradise, nor David on the throne of Israel. Yet, alas! what language can palliate crimes of so deep a die, or plead in excuse for the insensibility which followed? Though some transient remorse might have affected his soul, we hear of no *effectual* repentance till a faithful monitor is sent, by Divine appointment, to call the deluded monarch from the error of his ways. Perhaps, had the precious balm been longer withheld, David's wretched impenitence would have been protracted. But blessed be the wisdom and mercy of God, who out of evil can produce good—who can bring light itself out of darkness! This one sin shall be the means of preventing millions. How many would have fallen in a vain reliance on their own strength, if David had not offended! How many would have been desperate in the consciousness of their own guilt, if David had not received assurances of pardon!

While Nathan complains of the cruel rich man who had forcibly taken away the only lamb of his poor neighbor, David eagerly listens to the story. With a rigor which no laws could justify, he pronounces sentence against the offender. Here was no murder—no adultery, yet the blood of the imaginary tyrant must atone for his unfeeling cruelty. Little did the king suppose that he had uttered these menaces against himself. We have open ears to the crimes of others, we are deaf and insensible to our own; in the one case, rigorous judges—in the other, obsequious parasites.

The life of doctrine is in the *application*. When the prophet brings the word home to the bosom of David he cannot but be sensibly affected. "*Thou art the man.*" Though David be a king, he shall hear of his faults; God's messages are always impartial. To regard greatness on these occasions is treacherous flattery. The ambassadors of Christ must be gentle in the *form*, but in the *matter* of reproof resolute. They are the heralds of the King of heaven; they proclaim his will to mankind—"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel."

The heart of David is not able to withstand the message of God. Confounded and self-condemned, he cries out in the bitterness of a contrite heart, "I have sinned against the Lord!" The word was short, but earnest and passionate—it came from the bottom of a penitent soul. God cares not for studied phrases, but sincerity and affection; the deepest sorrow is not that which is loudest or most loquacious.

The first step towards repentance is the confession of guilt. "I have acknowledged my sin unto thee, O my God, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid." No sooner doth David say to the prophet, "I have sinned against the Lord," than he receives the comfortable assurance, "The Lord hath put away thy sin." He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. Who would not accuse *himself*, to be acquitted by God? Who would not declare his sin to the Searcher of hearts, to be relieved from that anguish of spirit which it is death to conceal? If we have offended, why should we hesitate to perform that duty which shall at once give glory to our Maker and bring consolation to our souls?

David had sworn, in a zeal for justice, that the rich oppressor, for taking his poor neighbor's lamb, should die the death. God is more favorable to David than to judge him out of his own mouth. "Thou shalt not die."

O the wonders of redeeming love! The letter of the law demanded eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood; but (as if a penitent confession had dispensed with the rigor of justice) God saith, "Thou *shalt not die.*" David was the voice of the *law*, awarding death unto sin: Nathan was the voice of the *Gospel*, awarding life unto repentance. "Come unto me," saith the Savior of mankind, "all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me—my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

David himself shall not die for his transgression, but he shall be deprived of the son of his adultery; the sword shall not depart from his house; he shall experience ingratitude and disaffection from his friends and from his children; he shall afford an example to future ages that God can grant absolution, and yet reserve his full right to inflict temporal punishment for sin. Where he has forgiven he may yet chastise; he does not forbear present correction, though he remits the future tremendous sentence. While he smites us not for our offences as an angry Judge, we may endure to smart at the will of a loving Father.

Yet even this infliction David deprecates with tears. The child is sick; the parent fasts, and prays, and weeps, and lies all night upon the earth, and is deaf to the voice of comfort. He mourns—he sues that the monument of his sin and the record of his shame, for whom he still entertained all the fondest sentiments of affection, might even yet be preserved to him. No doubt his grief was aggravated by the thought that God, to chastise the guilty father, was about to deprive him of his innocent child; while the cheering reflection that the gates of heaven would receive the unpolluted spirit which was hastening thither, seems for the moment to have been hidden from his eyes. Against this stroke he offers his prayers—he lifts up his soul to the throne of mercy.

No chastening is joyous, but grievous; the best nature cannot yield to it without some degree of reluctance. Far was it, nevertheless, from the heart of David to form any undue opposition to the will of God; he made use, not of murmurs, but supplications. There is no impatience in entreaties. He well knew that the Divine threatenings were not so denounced as to be incapable of revocation. If any means under heaven can avert judgments, it is the prayer of faith.

But neither faith nor prayer can preserve a feeble mortal from all temporal afflictions. Since the admission of sin into the world, the decree is gone forth, and "man is born to trouble." David must drink deeply of the cup of sorrow—the infant is no more.

His anxious attendants only whisper this sad news; they had witnessed the sufferings of their lord, they now look for all the paroxysms of frantic grief. This very secrecy proclaims to the vigilant ear of suspicion the sad truth which they trembled to utter. David perceives that his child is dead: and now he rises up from the earth on which he lay, and changes his apparel, and goes first into the house of the Lord to worship, and then into his own to eat—now he refuses not to listen to the voice of comfort. Till we know the determination of God, it is lawful for us to be importunate in our prayers; when the event has taken place, he demands our dutiful resignation.

"While the child lived, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me!" There spake the voice of faith and hope. David knew that those affections which God hath implanted in the soul would, like that soul, survive the body. He knew that a day would come when he should rejoin his child, to be se-

parated from him no more. He knew that his sincere repentance entitled him to look for a reception in those heavenly mansions to which innocence itself is translated. "Turn ye unto me, from whom ye have deeply revolted—cease to do evil—learn to do well. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him—and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon!"

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### 31.—THE CONSPIRACY OF ABSALOM.

When the son of Jesse (in the calamities of his early life) wandered in the wilderness, an exile, a fugitive, his safety every hour endangered by the machinations of Saul, there was peace in his soul. In the afflictions of his *later* days he feels the torture of a self-reproving conscience. His future pardon is promised, but not without his present suffering. In the heinous offence of Amnon, in the subsequent murder of the guilty prince, in the dissimulation by which that murder was effected, the unhappy father reads his own transgressions. The sting of *sorrow*, as well as of *death*, is sin.

Yet these are the beginnings of wo. Other chastisement is in store for the king of Israel. He must experience the utmost extreme of earthly misery—he must meet with the blackest ingratitude from the object of his fond affection.

The tears of David for the irrecoverable loss of his first-born now fall no longer—he comforts himself concerning Amnon, and begins to feel a degree of impatience for the return of Absalom. The long absence of

that darling son was more a punishment to the king than to the prince. Joab perceives the wishes of his lord, and artfully inclines him to their accomplishment. A woman of Tekoa personates a mourner, and, while she speaks of the loss of one child and the danger of another, excites in David compassion for himself and favor to his banished son. A parable taught him to *repent*—a parable teaches him to *forgive*.

Now Joab speeds to Geshur. The exiled prince shall return to Jerusalem; but as yet he is not admitted into the presence of his father. David's excessive lenity had already occasioned him the bitterest sorrows—he now assumes a severity of temper he cannot feel. "Let him go to his own house, but let him not see my face."

Two years is Absalom thus excluded from all intercourse with his parent. At last his impatient spirit can bear this absence no longer. He sends for Joab, the solicitor of his return—he requests instant death or unconditional pardon from his father. Perhaps his heart was not yet corrupted—or perhaps even now the deep-laid stratagem was forming which afterwards brought down ruin on his head. "Let me see the king's face, and if there be iniquity in me, kill me!" Either banishment or death seemed more tolerable to him than these public tokens of the royal displeasure.

What a torment shall it be to the wicked to be excluded from the presence of God without hope of recovery! Absalom will not live unless he beholds the face of that father whom afterwards he most unnaturally sought to destroy. God is the Father of spirits, without whom there can be no life, no being. To be exiled from Him is eternal death, eternal misery. If in thy presence, O God, is the fulness of joy, in thine absence must be the fulness of anguish and horror. O hide not thy face from us, but show us the light of thy countenance, that we may live and declare thy praise!

The impatience of Absalom pleads his cause with a fond parent—it seems to demonstrate, beyond all doubt, the ardor of his filial affection. Long had David been weary of his displeasure—at length he receives his son into his favor, and seals his pardon with a kiss of tenderness. Earthly parents know not how to retain everlasting anger towards their offspring, how much less shall the God of mercies be irreconcilably displeased with his own, and suffer his indignation to burn like fire which cannot be quenched? He will not always chide, neither keepeth he his anger for ever. His wrath endureth but a moment—in his favor is life—heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Absalom is now as much distinguished for greatness as for beauty. Beauty and greatness excite his pride, and pride occasions his ruin. Ambitious spirits will not rest contented with moderate prosperity. Before two years are expired Absalom frames a plot of most atrocious rebellion. None but his own father was his superior in Israel; none was so likely as himself, in all human probability, to succeed his father. If his turbulent mind could have been restrained for a few years, he might have expected that by succession which now he sought by force. An aspiring heart is always impatient, and holds time itself an enemy—thrusts itself importunately betwixt the hope and the enjoyment. Full of labor and travail, it has no intermission of its uneasiness till it hath brought forth its abortive progeny. O that our affections were as eager for spiritual and heavenly exaltation! O that our souls were equally ambitious to feel the weight of that crown of glory!

Outward pomp, unaccustomed shows of magnificence are wont to affect the light minds of the vulgar. Absalom, therefore, to the incomparable graces of his person adds the unusual state of more than royal dignity.

His chariots rattle and his horses trample proudly in the streets. Fifty footmen run before their glittering master. Jerusalem resounds with the praises of this glorious prince, and all are dazzled with his continual display of grandeur. The generous David suspects no danger from this studied ostentation. His partial love considers all this splendor as expressive of joy and thankfulness; as designed to do honor to their reconciliation; as not unbecoming the age, the rank, the beauty, the virtues of Absalom.

Having thus engaged the eyes and tongues of the people, the insidious prince lays snares for their *hearts*. He rises early and stands beside the way of the gate. Ambition is ever vigilant and industrious—the condescension of Absalom is equal to his greatness. How gloriously doth the prince of Israel neglect himself, and prefer the care of justice to his own gratifications! His ear is open to all who petition, all who complain; there is no cause which he flatters not. “See, thy matters are good and right, and there is none deputed by the king to hear thee.” What insinuations could be more powerful? What music is so sweet in the ear of the unstable multitude, as to hear themselves commended, their governors censured? Every man says, “How gracious a prince is Absalom! What a just and careful ruler would Absalom be? How happy were we, if we might be judged by Absalom. These qualities which *singly* exalt a character, conspire in his: beauty of person, magnificence of state, gracious affability, unwearied diligence, humility in the midst of grandeur, the tenderest pity, the most ardent love of justice, the most anxious care for the general welfare!”

Thus the hearts of the people are not *won*, but *stolen* by a false traitor from their lawful sovereign. Nothing was wanting but a cloak of religion to complete the treachery of that ungracious son, whose words were



peaceable, while war was in his heart. How easily is this also assumed! Absalom has a holy vow in Hebron. The devout man made it long since in Syria, and now hastens to perform it. "If the Lord shall bring me back again to Jerusalem, then will I serve the Lord." Hypocrites scruple not to profane the name and the worship of God himself in the accomplishment of their sacrilegious purpose.

How glad is the good old king that he is blessed with so pious a son! How does he, at Absalom's departure, implore the favor of heaven on his designs! The clouds of rebellion have long been gathering, at last they burst in all their fury over the astonished father.

With a heavy heart, his head covered, dissolved in tears, clothed in sackcloth, David retires from Jerusalem. Never did any sorrow, but that of his sacred and innocent Descendant, approach to his sorrow. How could he but weep, when the barbarous insurrection of a too dearly beloved child drove him from his house, from his throne, from the ark of his God? Shimei follows him with curses; Ahithophel, his once faithful counsellor, forsakes and betrays him; Absalom, invested with the royal purple, pursues his life with implacable hatred; and the moment is come when the issue of a battle must decide whether David perish in his own person or in that of his son.

"I said, Lord, be merciful unto me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee. All mine enemies whisper together against me, against me do they imagine this evil. *Let the sentence of guiltiness proceed against him; and now that he lieth, let him rise up no more!* Yea, even mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who did also eat of my bread, hath laid wait for me. O thou God of my strength, why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I thus heavily while mine enemies oppress me—while they say daily unto me, *Where is now thy God?*"

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

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### 32.—THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.

The day of battle is come. David, who had formerly been clad in armor to defend himself against a tyrannous father-in-law, must now seek the same protection against an unnatural son. He musters his soldiers, appoints his commanders, marshals his troops; and since their loyal importunity will not suffer him to hazard his own person, encourages them with his eye, and restrains them with his tongue. “Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake.” O holy David, what means this ill-placed love, this unjust mercy? Deal gently with a traitor! that traitor a son! that son an Absalom! the graceless darling of so good a father! and this for *thy* sake, whose crown he had usurped, whose blood he was thirsting after! For whose sake should Absalom be *pursued*, if he is spared for thine? He was courteous to thy followers—affable and plausible to all Israel—cruel and implacable only to thee. And yet thou sayest, “Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake.”

O perfect type of that ineffable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers, and, while they were at once scorning and killing him, could say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” If we are sons, we are ungracious, we are rebellious—but still

our heavenly Father hath compassion upon us—continues that life to us, and those endowments by which we provoke him—and bids his holy angels spare us and carry us in their arms. O the depth of the riches of the love of God! How unutterable is his goodness, and his love past finding out!

The battle is joined—David's followers are only a handful in comparison with those of Absalom. But what the pious king wants in numbers is supplied by the justice of his cause. The sword of Absalom is unsheathed by desperate ambition—David's, in his own necessary and just defence. By faith he was confident of victory; by *faith*, when the host shouted for the battle, he conjured the leaders of his army to spare his son.

They who had at first followed Absalom in their simplicity cannot now persecute his father in malice. With what courage could any Israelite draw his sword against David? On the contrary, who could want zeal and alacrity to fight for a righteous king and father against the conspiracy of a wicked child? The God of armies, who at his pleasure can save with many or with few, takes part with justice, and lets Israel feel what it is to bear arms for an impious usurper. The sword devours them by thousands, and "the wood devours more than the sword." Let no man hope to prosper by rebellion; the very trees, and thickets, and pits, and wild beasts of the woods shall conspire to the punishment of traitors. Among the rest, a fatal oak singles out the leader of this vile insurrection, and with one of its spreading arms snatches him away to speedy execution. The beauty of Absalom was every way ruinous. Those tresses, which once hung loosely dishevelled on his shoulders, now support the weight of his body, and make his pride his torment. Behold him suspended between heaven and earth, as one deservedly abandoned both by God and man! As if the Divine justice had selected

this punishment for treason, Absalom, Ahithophel, and Judas all die the same death. So shall they perish who lift up their hands against the Lord's anointed!

A soldier passes by and sees, but dares not strike the rebellious prince. His arm was restrained by the public charge of David, "Beware that none touch the young man Absalom." Joab, on the contrary, when he hears the tidings, hastens to the place, and without hesitation fixes his javelin in the offender's heart. His zeal accomplishes what the soldier's obedience had forborne. He feared not to prefer the *safety* of his sovereign to his *command*—regarding the life of David and the peace of Israel more than the weak affection of a father. That zeal and that obedience were both deserving of praise—the loyal subject equals the ardent patriot—the one revered his king, the other loved his master, and by that love disobeyed. All Israel did not afford Absalom so firm a friend as Joab had once proved himself. He taught the woman of Tekoa to intercede with David for his recall, after his three years' exile. He brought him up from Geshur to Jerusalem. He led him into the presence, into the arms of his parent. Yet now he who was his solicitor for the king's favor, is his executioner against the king's charge. He now forgot that he had been the friend of one who had forgotten that he was a son.

The dart of Joab is seconded by the weapons of his followers. Absalom dies as it were by a variety of deaths. The hand of Divine retribution makes his crimes legible in his punishment. He had exalted himself against his lawful sovereign—he had pierced his father's heart with many sorrows—he had caused strife and division in Israel. If by the law of Moses, he who *cursed* the authors of his being was stoned to death, how justly is a heap of stones cast on him who sought to imbrue his impious hands in a parent's *blood*!

Now Joab sounds the retreat, and calls off his eager troops from execution. He knew what his rebellious countrymen had deserved; but when Absalom is no more, mercy shall arrest the sword of justice. The generous heart can distinguish betwixt the leader of a faction and the misguided multitude; and can pity those who are deceived, while it ordains vengeance to their deceiver.

The proud and ambitious Absalom thought it would be injustice to mankind if he suffered the memory of his grandeur to perish. His three sons died in early infancy. That he might supply the loss, he reared a stately pillar in the king's dale, and called it after his own name, to perpetuate the honor of Absalom. Behold this curious pile demolished, and a ruinous heap thrown over his lifeless body, the monument of his rebellion and of his shame! Hear this, ye vain-glorious boasters, who leave no memorial behind you but of ill-deserved greatness: who teach death itself the language of adulation, and who enumerate the pompous titles which shall be recorded on your tombs! The best of this affectation is vanity; the worst is infamy and dishonor. While the memory of the just is blessed; and if his humility refuse an epitaph and retire to an unnoticed grave, God himself shall write his name upon the pillar of eternity.

Absalom is dead—who shall report it to his father? The busy Ahimaaz offers himself to be the messenger, and will not be dissuaded. Joab knew David too well to employ a friend on such an errand. An Ethiopian servant was fitter to bear this message than the son of the priest. Ahimaaz, though he anticipate the arrival of Cush, tells only of the victory: artfully suppressing those less welcome tidings which should fill his master's heart with unutterable anguish.

David inquires not, "How fares the host?" but, "How fares the young man Absalom?" Like a wise and faith-

ful messenger, Cush, by an honest insinuation, reveals the fatal truth—"The enemies of my lord, and those that seek his life be as that young man is!"

How is the king thunderstruck with the word of his servant? How is he bereaved of all comfort, and regardless of existence? "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" What do we hear? that he whose life was esteemed by his people as of more value than ten thousand of theirs, should be exchanged for an incestuous traitor? that he should lay down his life for a parricide and a murderer? But what shall we say to thy love, O Savior? Thou hast said to thy rebellious children, "I am the good Shepherd—the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep—No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." O love infinite, incomprehensible, whereat the angels of heaven are amazed, whereat thy saints are filled with transports of gratitude! For scarcely for a righteous man will one die—yet peradventure for a good man some will even dare to die—but God commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He hath said, "Deliver them from going down to the pit—I have found a ransom." Blessed are the people, O Lord, that know the joyful sound—they shall hear, and delight in thy salvation for ever and ever.

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### 33.—S O L O M O N .

At length the hour approaches which must put a period to the life and sorrows of David. And will not the towering ambition of Adonijah wait till the throne is

vacant, before he sets up his presumptuous claim? Too nearly resembling Absalom in pride and ostentation, he rushes eagerly into the crimes, into the misfortunes of his brother. He too "prepares chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him." Absalom and Adonijah were the darlings of their father, 1 Kings, 1 : 6 ; from their childhood they had known no rebuke, no contradiction. How rarely does this undue partiality terminate in joy! Absalom sought the *life* of David—Adonijah now grasps at his *crown*.

The government was as yet in the immediate appointment of God. He had chosen David as the successor of Saul—he had fixed on Solomon to supply the place of David. From that time till the extinction of the royal authority in Judah, the sceptre passed in uninterrupted order from the father to his first-born son.

Meanwhile Adonijah wants not friends to support his usurpation. Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host, the once faithful adherents to David, assist the aspiring prince with their presence and counsels. They had shared the fortunes of their sovereign in all his former calamities—they now behold him on the bed of age and death, and they pay their homage to the rising sun. The permanency of *friendship*, as well as *happiness*, cannot be ascertained by man till the last moments of his life. When we can no longer reward or punish, then will it appear who loved us for ourselves, and who associated with us for their own advantage.

The designation of Solomon to the throne was made public by the voice of Heaven. God had sent him at his birth a message of honor and love—had promised him the privilege of building a temple to His glory, and the establishment of his throne for ever. In vain, therefore, does Adonijah frame his conspiracy—in vain does he single out his brother as the object of indignity and neglect. In the decay of David's body his intellectual

faculties were not impaired. "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul from all adversity, Solomon my son shall sit on my throne this day." From the bed of sickness he steers the government of Israel with no unsteady hand. Instantly he gives full directions for the regal inauguration of Solomon. Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, a warrior of unshaken fidelity, are commanded to take with them the royal guard, to place Solomon on his father's mule, to carry him down in state to Gihon, to anoint him with the holy oil of the tabernacle, to sound the trumpets and proclaim him in the streets, to bring him back with triumph and magnificence to the court, and to set him on the royal throne with all the due ceremonies of coronation.

How pleasing was this command to them, who in Solomon's glory saw their own security! Benaiah applauds it—and, not fearing a father's envy, in David's presence wishes that the throne of Solomon may be exalted above that of David. The people are ravished with joy at this hopeful succession, and rend the earth and fill the heaven with the noise of their music and shouting. "God save the king—Long live the king—Let the king live for ever!"

The feast of Adonijah, which began in presumption, terminates in horror. The ears of the guests are suddenly pierced with the sound of those trumpets which at once proclaim the triumph of Solomon and their own confusion. Astonishment, and fearful expectation of vengeance fill their souls: and when the son of Abiathar brings more certain intelligence of their disappointment, every heart is cold—every face pale—terror gives wings to their feet. How suddenly is this daring troop dispersed! Adonijah, their aspiring prince, flies to the horns of the altar—as distrusting all hopes of life, save those which he rested on the sanctity of the place and the mercy of his generous rival.



Now David beholds a worthy object of his love in peaceful possession of the throne of Israel—now does he charge him to keep the commandments of God, to take heed to the statutes, and walk in the ways of the Almighty. The dying prophet exhorts the youthful monarch to exemplary holiness—he admonishes him to pay due allegiance to the King of kings—he gives him the weighty charge of building the house of God—he lays before the eyes of his son the model and pattern of that sacred work, the merit of which belongs to *David* no less than Solomon. David bestows the gold and silver for this holy use—an hundred thousand talents of gold—ten times as much silver—brass and iron beyond all weight. David excites the princes of Israel to give their assistance—takes notice of their bountiful offerings—numbers the Levites and sets them their respective tasks. Even the singers and musicians are appointed to their office by the sweet Psalmist of Israel. And when all things are in their desired order and due state of preparation, he blesses Solomon and his people, and sleeps with his fathers. O happy soul, how quiet possession hast thou taken, after so many tumults, of a better crown! Thou, who didst prepare all things for the house of thy God, how art thou welcomed to that glorious tabernacle, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

Again is Solomon crowned the sovereign of Israel—now in his own right, as formerly in his father's, he sits upon the seat of David. He loves the Lord, and is loved by him. The wicked are taken away from before the king, and his throne is established in righteousness.

As yet the high places, on which stood a variety of altars, were frequented both by the people and the king. Before he builds the temple at Jerusalem, Solomon goes up to Gibeon. There was the allowed altar of Jehovah; there was the tabernacle, though the ark was in the city

of David. The young monarch, desiring to begin his reign with God, offers on that altar no less than a thousand sacrifices.

How sweet is the repose of true piety! The night cannot but be happy if the day hath been holy. Solomon lays him down to sleep; and lo, he sees him who is invisible, and hears the voice of a merciful God, "Ask me what I shall give thee." We cannot be so liberal to ourselves as by our oblations to the Author of all good. Though the cattle on a thousand hills are his own, he graciously accepts the freewill offering of his servant. And art thou less bounteous, O God, to thy poorest worshipper under the Gospel, than thou wast to the prince of Israel? Thou hast said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, I will give unto you." Let thy merciful ears be ever open to the prayer of thy servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please thee!

There needs no time for deliberation—the waking thoughts of Solomon had been intent on wisdom. His heart was so filled with the love and admiration of that heavenly gift that it fastened at once on the grace it had longed for. "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people." Had not Solomon been already distinguished for wisdom he would have been less sensible of its value—he would not thus have preferred it in his desires—he would not have esteemed it the pearl of greatest value in his diadem. Solomon well knew that royalty without wisdom would be only pre-eminence of infamy—that life itself would be tedious and power unprofitable.

The king of Israel awakes and finds that his dream was divine and oracular. Illumination is shed over his heart; he feels that God hath given him a new soul. No wonder that on his return from the tabernacle to the ark he testifies his joy and thankfulness by burnt-offer.

ings, and peace-offerings, and public feastings. The heart which is filled with a sense of the presence and favor of God, cannot refrain itself from the outward expression of gratitude. "God is the Lord who hath showed us *light*—bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar! Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, I will exalt thee."

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### 34.—THE TEMPLE.

Four years are soon elapsed in preparations for the house of God. Solomon avails himself of the exquisite art of the Tyrians, of the zeal and ardor of his own people. Hiram procures him artificers in gold, in silk, in purple; thirty thousand Israelites in their courses hew down the stately cedars; while the humble Gibeonites, the objects of Saul's furious and unhallowed zeal, (being in number an hundred and fifty thousand,) are employed in hewing stones and bearing burdens. None are so mean but they may be useful in their callings: even less honorable services are equally necessary. Let us but labor with honest alacrity, and God will accept our industry and count it for skill.

The temple is framed in Lebanon and set up in Sion. Neither hammers nor axes are heard in this holy structure. There was nothing but noise in Lebanon; nothing in Sion but silence and peace. Whatever tumults are abroad, all should be quietness and sweet concord in the church. O God, why do we suffer schism and furious contention to be heard within thy sanctuary? Lord, knit the hearts of thy servants together in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace; that we may

mind and speak the same things ; that thou, who art the God of peace, mayest take pleasure to dwell in our souls !

Now is the foundation laid, and the walls are rising of that glorious fabric which all nations have admired and all ages celebrated. Even those piles which were laid on the base of the building were not rugged and rude, but hewn and costly ; the part which lies covered with earth was no less carefully wrought than those which are more conspicuous. God hath delight in the hidden value of his spiritual temple. How many noble graces of his servants have been buried in obscurity—neglected or forgotten by men, but held in their due estimation in the sight of God !

The *matter* of this splendid frame vies with its proportion. Nothing but white marble is seen without, nothing but gold and cedar within. Upon the hill of Sion stands that snowy fabric, which both invites and dazzles the eye of the passenger afar off. God admits of nothing that is not pure and exquisite. His church consists of none but the faithful. He dwelleth only in the heart which is devoted to his fear.

The *fashion* of the temple corresponded with that of the tabernacle in the wilderness—both were constructed under the same heavenly directions, the same mystery was shadowed out in both. But the one was framed in the state of Israel's wanderings, the other in the land of promise—the one was fitted for motion, the other for rest—the one denoted the good will of a multitude, the other the munificence of a king.

But why do we fasten our eyes on wood, and stone, and metals ? God has no pleasure in these for their own sake, but for their spiritual signification. Wherever He is, there is his temple. O God, thou vouchsafest to dwell in the humble and contrite heart—while we have our being in thee, thou hast thine abode in us. The heaven

of heavens is not able to contain thee, but thou dost not despise the hallowed mansion of a regenerate soul. In the heart of thy faithful servants, in the church of thy saints on earth, in the throne of thy celestial glory, thou art present, and abidest for ever. All these were typified by thy material temple—it had its porch, its sanctuary, its holy of holies. Yet what is the value of this assemblage of gold and marble in comparison with the living temple of the Holy Ghost, which is our body? What is the temple of this body of ours to the temple of Christ's body, which is his church? And what is the temple of God's church on earth, to that which triumphs gloriously in heaven?

Lo, in the outward porch, we see an image of the christian soul entering into the society of the church—in the holy place, the communion of the true visible church on earth selected from the world—in the holy of holies, whereinto the high-priest entered once a-year, the glorious heaven, into which our true high-priest, Christ Jesus, entered once for all, to make atonement betwixt God and man.

In all these there is the most perfect correspondence, in proportion, in matter, in situation.

How exquisite a *symmetry* hast thou ordained, O God, betwixt the faithful heart and thy church on earth, with that in heaven! In the believing soul there is no immeasurable height of pride, nor breadth of passion, nor yet the absence of grace—in the militant church, a necessary inequality without disproportion, its government, its extent, its jurisdiction in harmony with each other—in the church triumphant, eternity, perfection, and incomprehensible glory.

With respect to the *materials*, all were most excellent. The wood was precious, sweet, lasting—the stone, beautiful, costly, insensible of age—the gold pure and glittering. So perfect are the graces of the children of

God—so perfect are the ordinances of his church—so perfect is the felicity of his glorified saints.

In *situation*, we find one court of the temple open even to the uncircumcised and unclean—another, reserved for the children of Israel—a third, inaccessible but to the tribe of Levi. *There* was the altar for sacrifice—there was the sea of brass for purification. While in the covered rooms of the temple, one part was appropriated to the Levites—another yet more holy, to the priests—the holiest of all, to the chosen descendant and representative of Aaron.

If from the walls we look to the furniture, still every thing is typical and figurative. What is the altar whereon our sacrifices of prayer and praise are offered to the Almighty, but a devout and contrite soul? What the golden candlesticks, but the understanding illuminated by grace, wherein the light of the knowledge of God and of his divine will shines for ever? Nay, if we presume so far as to enter into the holy of holies, even there, O God, do we find our unworthy hearts so honored by thee, that they are made as the very ark where thy royal law and thine heavenly manna are preserved for ever: there do we behold that mercy-seat from whence, shaded by the wings of the glorious cherubim, thou givest the testimony of thy good Spirit witnessing with ours that we are the children of God.

Behold, if Solomon built a temple unto thee, thou hast built a temple to thyself in us. We are not only by thy grace parts of thy spiritual building, but are ourselves living temples in thy Sion. O do thou ever dwell in this thine house, and there let us ever serve thee! Wherefore hast thou a temple but that thou mayst be present with us, and that we may show forth thy praise? Once did thine ark reside with thy people in tents, ever changing and removing from place to place—then didst thou sojourn in Shiloh—afterwards thou didst conde-

scend to take up thine abode amongst men, and to dwell in thine own house at thy Jerusalem. So didst thou at the beginning hold converse with the patriarchs—so didst thou sojourn with Israel under the law—but now under the Gospel dispensation thou dost make a constant residence in the hearts of thy grateful children. From thence thou wilt depart no more—they shall be separated from the world—they shall be separated from themselves—but who shall separate them from the love and from the presence of Christ?

Great was the glory of the first temple—greater still that of the second. Though unequal to the former in outward circumstances of splendor, the bringing in of a better hope caused the ministration of righteousness to exceed in glory. “Yet once—it is a little while—and I will shake all nations—and the desire of all nations shall come—and in this place will I give peace—and I will fill this house with glory,” saith the Lord of hosts.

Wheresoever thou art, O God, thou art worthy of adoration. Since thou wilt not disdain to dwell in us, be thou ever worshipped in us. From the altars of our hearts let the incense of holy meditation, of fervent prayer, of cheerful thanksgiving ascend, and find acceptance. Let the pure lights of faith and godly conversation shine before thee and before men, and never be extinguished. Let our souls be refreshed and strengthened by the bread of life—let us treasure up thy sacred laws, and the unfading promises of thy Gospel. Speak thou comfortably to us from thy mercy-seat, thou that art the propitiation for our sins. Suffer nothing to enter in that is unclean. Sanctify us to thyself, and be thou ever sanctified in us!

## 35.—THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

The great lights of heaven are not intended for obscurity. The fame of Solomon's wisdom is diffused throughout the world—all nations are full of admiration and praise. Even so, O thou everlasting King of peace, thy name is great among the heathen, thy sound is gone out into all the earth, and thy words unto the ends of the world. Thou art a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of thy people Israel.

No doubt many from all coasts came to behold this prodigy of wisdom. Among the rest, a sovereign princess, herself distinguished by a variety of endowments, travels from the far-distant seat of her dominion to Jerusalem, that she may hear, and learn, and wonder. Many are known to cross the seas from motives of *curiosity*—some few philosophers have travelled far in pursuit of *science*—merchants repair to foreign climates for *wealth*—and princes send their ambassadors to other regions on their affairs of *state*—but that a rich and great queen should travel from the remote Sheba to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and be instructed in the doctrines of his religion, is an occurrence unexampled in the history of mankind. Why should we then think any labor too great, any difficulties too formidable to hear one greater than Solomon? How justly shall the queen of the south rise up in judgment with this generation, and condemn us, who, when Wisdom crieth in the streets, do not, will not regard the heavenly voice?

Dissatisfied with the learning, and probably disgusted with the worship of her own country, she betakes herself to the oracles of God. It is good that in matters of such consequence we should examine for ourselves; and happy are we when we obtain the satisfaction we desire. The mind which takes all upon trust, will be



destitute of knowledge—the mind which is always perplexed with doubts, will know nothing as it ought. A proper spirit of inquiry animates us in the pursuit of truth—conviction establishes us in the truth, when we have found it. It were misery and disquiet to doubt, did we not look forward to that period when all doubt shall be removed. Thoughts of this nature must not dwell too long upon the soul. They may be useful as passengers—they are dangerous as inmates. Happy are we if we can find a Solomon to remove them. Now we know in part; but a time shall come, when that which is in part shall be done away, and all shall be perfection of knowledge and of glory.

Fame, in its variety of rumors, too frequently exaggerates. The wise princess will not trust to this precarious informer, whose narratives are often either doubtful or fabulous, and (like winds or streams) increase in their progress. If great things had not been spoken of Solomon, report had wronged him—if the facts were but justly related, they still must fill the minds of the hearers with astonishment. The queen of Sheba comes in person to examine into the truth of these wonders. She knew that wisdom was more precious than rubies—that its merchandise was better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. Alas, how dangerous is it, in the most important of all concerns, to trust implicitly to the opinions of others! Those rational faculties are misapplied, which are not devoted by their possessors to the interests of religion and the benefit of their own souls.

Should we come to a rich treasure, we should need no injunction to avail ourselves as much as possible of the benefit. The royal proselyte, who had been deterred by no difficulties in the pursuit of knowledge, when at last she is arrived at Jerusalem, will not forego her own advantage. She states all her doubts to this great mas-

ter of wisdom, and receives instruction while he resolves them. O let us not neglect the opportunities afforded *us* of furnishing our souls with profitable, with saving knowledge! Of what use is it, that he who taught Solomon condescends to be our teacher, if, sitting at the feet of Christ, we leave our hearts either in ignorance or perplexity?

The queen of Sheba came with a magnificent train, with camels laden with gold, and jewels, and rich odors. Though she sought the presence of a rich and mighty king, she will not be sparing of her oblations. She came in search of an invaluable treasure, and she will not withhold the just tokens of her gratitude.

Expectation is no better than a kind enemy to merit; if we look *beyond* an object, it escapes our accurate view. Many would have been admired, if they had not been too loudly proclaimed by the voice of fame; many, upon inquiry, fall as much below their real standard of excellence as our imaginations had raised them above it. This disadvantage had Solomon with his royal guest. Rumor bade her look for incredible excellence; yet so wonderful were the perfections of Solomon, that they overcame the highest expectation and the most liberal belief. When she beheld his royal buildings, the magnificence of his kingdom, the solemnities of his religion, his stately ascent into the house of the Lord, she confessed her own incredulity, and the inadequacy of those very reports which she had condemned as fabulous. "I believed not the words, till I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and lo, the half was not told me." How should our souls be filled with wonder at thee, O thou Son of David, who didst not receive the Spirit by measure? who hast framed this glorious temple of the universe, and the still greater splendors of thy celestial palace? whose infinite providence ordereth all things in heaven and earth? who, when thou didst ascend up on high,

didst lead captivity captive, and gavest such gifts unto men ?

The wise princess can now form a just estimate of the mercy of God in bestowing such a monarch on his favored people. She pronounces them blessed on whom that light shineth which was sent from heaven to benefit mankind. "Happy are thy servants who stand continually before thee and hear thy wisdom." She held this privilege more valuable than any gift which the world had to offer ; more precious than earthly thrones and sceptres. How should we, who hear the words of God and live under the sound of the glorious Gospel, how should we look on ourselves as the happiest of mankind ! How should every worldly advantage and delight be esteemed as less than nothing in comparison with distinctions like these !

The experience of the queen had taught her how happy is that people whose rulers delight in wisdom. She magnifies the God of Israel—she blesses Solomon—she congratulates his subjects. "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighteth in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice." The glory of Solomon was equalled by the happiness of Israel. There is no earthly proof of God's love to any nation comparable to that of his delegating his authority to wise and pious rulers. They are the ministers of God to us for good ; in their time shall the righteous flourish. But, O God, how hast thou loved thy chosen Israel, the church, in setting over us that righteous Branch of Jesse, whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace ! In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name whereby he shall be called, *the Lord our Righteousness*. Sing, O heaven, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into singing, O moun-

tains, for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have everlasting mercy upon his heritage!

Rich and magnificent as Solomon was before, the queen of Sheba adds yet to his wealth. An hundred and twenty talents of pure gold, with precious jewels and costly odors, are sent by her to the royal treasury. Was not this a type of that homage which thou shouldst receive, O blessed Jesus, from the Gentile world? "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts; yea, all kings shall fall down before him—all nations shall serve him."

Solomon requites these presents with the munificence of a patron, with the generosity of a prince. We cannot but be gainers by whatever we present unto thee, O God of wisdom and peace. Teach us to leave the remote regions of our infidelity and worldly thoughts, that we may learn of thee, who givest to all men liberally, and upbraidest not! Then shall our hearts, our sincere (though imperfect) services find acceptance in thy sight; then shall we receive from thy gracious hand present comfort and eternal glory.

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### 36.—JEROBOAM.

The successor of David now sleeps in the tomb; his wisdom, his infirmities, his sin and his repentance no longer awaken the sorrow or the admiration of mankind. Rehoboam, his son, fears no rival; he goes up to Shechem to take undisturbed possession of the vacant throne. Thither assembled the tribes of Israel, and at their head the proud and factious Jeroboam.

“Thy father made our yoke grievous—make thou it lighter, and we will serve thee.” How much danger lurked under this specious request! Is it the promise of allegiance, or the threat of sedition? Is it the voice of humility or of treason? How artfully does the paricide hold the olive-branch over his sword! If Rehoboam refuses to gratify the people he endangers his kingdom. If he yields, he throws disgrace on the memory of his father.

The suggestion itself was *false*, as well as undutiful. The warlike reigns of Saul and David had given unavoidable cause for complaint. All was calm when Solomon held the sceptre; the tributes of *foreign* nations enriched his treasury—his temples and palaces were reared by *foreign* labor: while the tasks of Israel were easy—as free from servility, as from pain. In his reign Judah and Israel were many as the sand on the sea-shore, rejoicing each man under his vine and under his fig-tree. In his reign, silver was in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars as sycamore trees in the vale for abundance. Did this universal plenty and prosperity indicate oppressive exactions? But base and grovelling souls delight in casting censures on departed worth. The *benefits* of Solomon’s reign are passed over in silence—imaginary grievances are descanted on with clamor. Who shall hope that his merit or his greatness shall altogether exempt him from obloquy, when the name of Solomon is thus traduced in the very presence of his son?

The ancient counsellors of the deceased monarch had learned of their master, that “a soft answer turneth away wrath.” Wisely, therefore, do they entreat Rehoboam to speak good words unto the people, and attach them to him for ever. It is no hard condition, by meekness and condescension to bind the hearts and secure the allegiance of a mighty nation. Had this sage advice been adopted, the son of Nebat might have fled

again into Egypt—rebellion would have found an unfruitful soil in Israel.

Age brings with it experience, and ripens wisdom—youth is too often rash, headstrong, seduced by passion, the foe to reason. Many a kingdom, many a life, many a soul has been lost by evil counsellors: such were those whom Rehoboam preferred to the grey-headed servants of his father. He now hears how unfit it is for majesty to submit to any terms and stipulations—how requisite it is to deal harshly with this presumption, and to crush the yet unformed mischief ere it break out into rebellion. They bid him speak the language of haughty and indignant pride. He glories in the falsely-alleged tyranny of Solomon. “My father made your yoke heavy, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, I will chastise you with scorpions.”

O senseless people and infatuated prince! Had they complained that in the latter days of Solomon *religion* had been corrupted, had they besought their new king to begin his reign with God, to demolish the idols, to purify the temple, to restore devotion to its original simplicity, such requests as these would have done honor to their national character—now they seek for nothing but the gratification of themselves; and their king, regardless of their reformation, has nothing in view but imperious sovereignty. Let him but accomplish this point, his people may be profligate or miserable, it is a matter of indifference to himself!

Now that flame bursts out at once, which was never more to be extinguished. The furious multitude, grown desperate by these denunciations of rigor, exclaim with one voice, “What portion have we in David? To your tents, O Israel!”

The son of Nebat has now the crown he was so solicitous to obtain. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin

alone adhere to the descendant of David. The example of a general rebellion will not make them unfaithful to their misguided sovereign—their swords are ready to be drawn in his defence—they breathe nothing but vengeance and war—when suddenly a message from God forbids the battle, and dismisses these mighty armies. There was yet some virtue in Rehoboam, in that he submitted to the will of Heaven, and held his peace, because the Lord had done it. With a hundred and fourscore thousand adherents he dares not strive against his Maker—at once he lays down his arms, and after such a prohibition, will not seek even the recovery of his kingdom by bloodshed.

Meanwhile his successful rival foments a *spiritual* as well as a *civil* defection. He well knew the affinity between treason and idolatry—he knew that they who feared God would not fail to honor the king. Thus, therefore, he reasons in his heart, “It is true, that the ten tribes have placed the sceptre in my hands—this sudden advancement may as suddenly decline—their return to their loyalty will at once deprive me of my life and kingdom. If they go up to worship at Jerusalem, they will behold the glorious temple, they will see the magnificent palace of Solomon, and remember their first allegiance. There the solicitations of their brethren, the admonitions of the priests, the feelings of their own hearts will bid them throw themselves on the mercy of their lawful prince. I must therefore divert them from Jerusalem, or my glory is baseless and unreal. Without having recourse to direct prohibition, which will but inflame their desires, I will propose to them a more compendious, more plausible worship. They shall have gods, and altars, and priests, and sacrifices of their own.”

How easily is the variable populace seduced by every blast of vain doctrine, through the slight of men and

cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive! No sooner are the idols of Jeroboam set up, than all Israel falls prostrate in humble adoration—the new king stands before his new altar, and the censer is in his impious hand.

At this moment a man of God comes from Judah to denounce the indignation of Heaven. When the king of Israel is in the height of his state and superstition, the courageous prophet fears not to interrupt the service with solemn exclamations of judgment. The messenger of Jehovah fears neither the power nor malice of the tyrant, whom he dared to reprove so sharply in the midst of his pompous magnificence. He foretells the name of that descendant of David who should overthrow these altars, annul these ceremonies, and (recovering his own rights and those of his God) should overwhelm the rivals of both with demolition and ruin.

And, lest the remote event of the prediction should lessen its credibility, a present demonstration evidences its future accomplishment. The altar even now is rent in pieces—the ashes on it even now are scattered. With what amazement must the seduced Israelites behold this miracle! How must they tremble at their apostacy, when they see the power of the God whom they had forsaken? when they see him rending the altars of idolatry, and breaking them to pieces at the voice of his prophet? Thus *some* of the beholders might possibly be affected: but Jeroboam, impatient of reproof, rebellious against God and man, instead of bowing the knee in humiliation, stretches out his hand for revenge—"Lay hold on him."

How easily can the Almighty prove to the profane and tyrannous that wherein they deal proudly he is above them! The hand stretched out in rage suddenly dries up and remains senseless and immoveable. There stands the king of Israel, like some ancient statue, to



which the skill of the artist has given looks and gestures of indignation, while itself is only lifeless marble. Now are his threats converted into humble entreaties—the prophet, so late the object of his wrath, must now intercede with God for his restoration. He might justly have been answered, “Thine intentions to me were cruel—had thine hand prevailed *I* should have sued to *thee* in vain. Continue a fearful spectacle of the vengeance of thy Maker!” But the servant of God must not strive—he must requite barbarity itself with meekness. The prophet makes intercession for Jeroboam—he is heard and answered with success.

And will not even this prevail on an obdurate heart? Will not the king of Israel now renounce his idolatry? Will not he say, “Lord, thou hast stricken me in justice—thou hast healed me in mercy—I will provoke thee no more—this hand which thou hast restored me shall be consecrated to thee, in pulling down these bold abominations?” Alas, he persists in his impieties, and as if he had neither experienced the goodness nor severity of God, lives and dies an idolater.

The wretched heir to his crimes, as well as his throne, falls by assassination—his family is exterminated—his name remembered with horror, and handed down with infamy to succeeding generations. “Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite for a moment? I went by, and lo, he was gone—I sought him, but his place could no where be found!”

## 37.—ELIJAH AT SAREPTA.

The providence of God seems to have reserved his most illustrious prophet for an age of extreme depravity. The Searcher of hearts adapts his servants to the work which he commissions them to perform, and raises himself up such witnesses as are best able to evince their heavenly mission. Moses, gentle in spirit, mighty in wonders, was fitted for the various events which befell him in his intercourse both with Pharaoh and with the afflicted, and at the same time rebellious Israelites. The grave and holy Samuel flourished when the people of God were quietly seated in the land of promise—while the ardent zeal of Elijah was such as best became that desperate state of declension into which “back-sliding Israel” had fallen, when the crimes of Jeroboam were buried in those of Ahab.

“As the Lord God of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” After many solicitations and warnings, Israel is sentenced by the tongue that had so often interceded with God in its behalf. The courage of Elijah is equal to his power. He dares proclaim to the face of Ahab those judgments to which the wickedness of both king and people had exposed them. No earthly power could be formidable to one who had such an interest in heaven that he could either shut it up or open it at pleasure. Those prayers which could restrain the clouds, could far more easily avert the sword of persecution.

The drought which had been denounced by Elijah occasions an immediate famine. From the consequences of this visitation the prophet himself is not exempted. The children of light are often suffered to participate in the temporal calamities of offenders. The brook of

Cherith shall for a while relieve the thirst of the man of God—and he, whose worth entitled him to a welcome even in the courts of kings, is fed by miracle in his retirement.

At length the brook is dried up, and the prophet is commanded to seek elsewhere for support. "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months—but unto none of them was Elijah sent—he repaired to Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow."

The prophet follows the directions of his God—the widow of Sarepta, under the same guidance, goes forth as it were to meet him. Emboldened by the charge he had received, Elijah no sooner beholds her than he requests some sustenance for exhausted nature. "Fetch me a little water in a vessel that I may drink—bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand."

Even in a city of Zidon, the habit and demeanor of Elijah proclaim him to be a prophet of Jehovah. When every morsel was precious, he scruples not, in virtue of his character, to solicit immediate relief. The *claim* seems at once to be acknowledged—but the person whom he addresses is compelled to an unwilling refusal.

"As the Lord thy God liveth, I have nothing, save a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering a few sticks, that I may go in and dress it for my son, that we may eat it and die." It was time for the prophet to bring comfort to these mourners. The miserable parent was now preparing her last meal—after one wretched repast, she looked forward to a twofold death, in her own person, and that of her child. It is the glory of God to assist us when we seem to be utterly forsaken—our deliverance is then most welcome, as being least expected.

But what a trial is this of the faith of a weak proselyte? Fear not, do as thou hast said—but bring me there-

of first, and afterwards make for thee and thy son. For thus saith the God of Israel, *The barrel of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD send rain upon the earth.*" She must part with her present food, in expectation of future, which was to be provided her by miracle—she must feed a stranger ere she attended to herself and her son—she must shorten her life, in hopes of its continuance. "Bold Israelite," might she have said, "wast thou even a friend, or brother, would such a request beseem thee? Had I superfluity of provision thou mightest have shared it with me—now, that I have only one morsel for my child, what can induce me to listen to an unknown traveller? Thou sayest the meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail. At this moment let thy word come to pass. When thou hast exhausted the remainder of my store, in vain shall I challenge the performance of thy promise. If thou canst thus multiply food, why art *thou* in want of sustenance?"

But the pious widow was taught by God not to distrust his prophet. Without one murmur or complaint she obeys his commands, and hopes for the accomplishment of his prediction. "He that saveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall save it." Surely her faith was no less efficacious than the prayers of Elijah. The mercy of God crowns her liberality with an abundant reward. Who shall fear to extend relief to the necessitous, when the Father of heaven has declared that he will hold in everlasting remembrance the Christian's work, and labor that proceedeth of love?

The barrel of meal wastes not, the cruse of oil doth not fail. With what thankful devotion must she have partaken of that food which the providence of God bestowed in so supernatural a manner! How welcome a guest was Elijah, who was thus the minister of God to her for good! No longer apprehensive of famine, she

now looks on her son with all those exquisite feelings of hope, and love, and rapture which none but parents can conceive—which not even parents can express!

Alas, at what moment can we pronounce ourselves secure from evil? The youth who had been thus rescued from famine is suddenly attacked by sickness. While her roof is yet honored with the presence of Elijah she beholds the beloved of her heart torn by the irresistible arm of death from her embraces.

How ready are we to mistake the grounds of our affliction, and attribute them to imaginary causes! The passionate mother imputes the death of her son to the presence of Elijah. In distraction of her grief she spares not her best benefactor. "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come hither to call my sins to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

The prophet, instead of chiding the afflicted parent, humbly expostulates with his God. Though he was fervent in spirit, his pity extinguishes all anger at this unjust accusation—it rather serves to increase the ardor of his application to the Almighty. His only remedy is prayer. That which shut heaven from rain, seeks to open it for life. He pleads his interest with God—the distress of the sufferer—her insupportable calamity in being deprived of her last remaining comfort—and he presumes to urge the consequences which would befall *himself*. "See what a return Elijah has made for hospitality—surely he must be devoid either of power or of gratitude!"

Having thus made intercession with his God, the prophet, in an ecstasy of spirit, approaches the lifeless remains. Thrice does he stretch himself upon the body, as if he would transmit into the child a portion of his own existence—thrice does he call on the Almighty to restore the departed soul. The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous, in all cases of difficulty and danger,

has recourse to the Divine omnipotence. What can Elijah ask that God shall deny? The Lord heard the voice of his servant—the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

Call upon me in the time of trouble—so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me. With what delight does the man of God take the living child in his arms and present him to his mother, a glorious proof of the power, the mercy, and the peculiar favor of heaven!

Now, when the astonished parent grasps the warm hand of her son; sees his eyes once more fixed on hers; beholds life, health and activity in every action, in every gesture; *now* she exclaims, "By this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." Alas, had she not before sufficient evidence of Elijah's Divine commission? Was not the barrel of meal, was not the cruse of oil demonstration? The most enlightened soul may sometimes stand in need of fresh supplies of heavenly assistance. Blessed be the mercy of that God who provides help for our infirmities, and condescends (as it were on our own terms) to increase our faith and work out our salvation.

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### 38.—ELIJAH ON CARMEL.

For more than three years was the land of Israel afflicted by drought and famine. Elijah, to whom the people ascribe their misery, is all this time the object of their hatred and execrations. They abhor, not those sins which had *deserved* God's vengeance, but the righteous prophet by whose ministry it was *inflicted*. At length the voice of heaven calls the holy man from Sa-

repta, and sends him on his perilous embassy : " Go, show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." The king and people of Israel shall witness that God performeth the word of his servants and proves his own veracity in theirs.

The governor of Ahab's house is faithful to Jehovah, while his master is the slave of Baal : he had hazarded his own life to preserve those prophets whom Jezebel sought to destroy. To him, therefore, while he is sent in search of pasture and springs of water, Elijah fears not to present himself, demanding an interview with his master.

Obadiah, who had prostrated himself to the earth on sight of the prophet, receives the message with terror ; he sees nothing but danger and death either to himself or to Elijah ; to himself, if the object of Ahab's fury be rescued ; to Elijah, if he encounter the tyrant's indignation.

But when the holy man confirms his purpose with an oath, and declares that he will surely behold the face of Ahab, Obadiah delays no longer. No doubt the king was astonished to hear that Elijah was coming to meet him. He feared, though he hated the prophet. He was aware that the man whom he had so long and so fruitlessly sought to destroy, would not seek his presence but under a sure guard and with some high commission. He knew that Elijah was invested with no common powers from above—that the mantle of the prophet was more honored than his own royal purple. The withered arm of Jeroboam is now in the eye of his fancy. He dares not lift up his hand against the messenger of Jehovah.

But while he refrains from actual violence he forbears not to inveigh against Elijah as the occasion of this general misery : " Art thou he that troubleth Israel ?" The prophet had reproved an adulterous genera-

tion; he had denounced the judgments of God on their disobedience; but the true cause of their suffering was their sin. Foolish men are plagued for their *offence*, and because of their *wickedness*. Most justly therefore does Elijah, in all the boldness of conscious innocence, repel and retort the charge: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord." Standing alone amidst the train of Ahab, he shows him that no earthly glory can appal that man who is blessed with revelations from God. He commands him, as one having authority, to gather together his idolatrous prophets to the top of Carmel—he bids him convene an assembly of the people. He speaks as if he were about to perform some amazing miracle in the sight of all Israel. The heart of the tyrant is overawed by superior virtue—he trembles and obeys.

The tribes are met together. Elijah reproves them, not merely for their idolatry, but for their inconstancy and irresolution. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him!" Indifference and neutrality in religious matters is of itself a grievous crime; it is in fact the worst of all hostility against God.

Whether from guilt, or fear, or uncertainty, Israel is silent—and Elijah addresses them once more. "I only am a prophet of the Lord, while Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let us each prepare a sacrifice—their devotion shall be combined, *mine* single—the God that answereth by fire, let him be God." The proposition is fair, and open, and incapable of evasion. Israel cannot but approve it. The prophets of Baal dare not signify disapprobation. The God who commanded this trial prepared confusion for the authors of idolatry and triumph for his heavenly truth.

The prophets of Baal embrace the condition in all the terror of guiltiness. They prepare the sacrifice; they



lay the victim on the wood; they cry unto their idol from morning until noon, "O Baal, hear us!" They rend the skies with clamor; they leap upon the altar, as if they would ascend to meet those fires which delayed to come down; mount Carmel echoes with their shrieks, but the heaven is silent. Elijah himself forgets his austerity, and derides their mockery of devotion. "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened."

The idolaters renew their horrid cries; they seize in frantic rage on the instruments of sacrifice, and shed their own blood upon their altar. How cruel, how tyrannous is superstition! The true God abhors those self-inflicted tortures. He wills us rather to mortify our *corruptions*, to subdue our irregular desires, to worship him in spirit and in truth, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to himself, which is our *reasonable* service.

How gladly would the apostate spirit, who once fell like lightning from heaven, have now come down in that form on the altar of his votaries! But God forbids it. All the powers of hell are unable to convey one spark of fire into the air. The evening draws on—the hope of idolatry is turned into confusion. The prophets of Baal, dismayed at the ill success of their shrieks, and wounds, and frantic gesticulations, maintain the contest no longer—they sit down, overwhelmed with shame, and weariness, and anguish—tormenting themselves with their own despair, and dreading the success of their adversary.

Now does the prophet of Jehovah call the people to witness his sincere proceedings. He avails himself of the opportunity of time and place—at the hour of evening-sacrifice he repairs the altar of God which the degeneracy of Israel had suffered to fall into ruin. O holy man, what means this labor? What need is there of

these unseasonable reparations? Was there not an altar, was there not a sacrifice now ready? Did not the victim which the worshippers of Baal had prepared await the descent of that fire which thy prayers should bring down from heaven? It was thy just detestation of idolatry which made thee refuse to avail thyself of their profanations. The altar, which in better times had been consecrated to thy God, is more dear to thee in its ruins than all the pride and magnificence of pagan worship!

Elijah lays twelve stones on this hallowed pile, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. Ten of these were perverted to Baal. He regards not their present apostacy—he has respect unto the ancient covenant made with the holy patriarchs—he would, if possible, bring them back to their primitive simplicity of worship. He well knew that the past unworthiness of Israel would not blot them out from the book of remembrance, if they returned from their delusions to the ways of truth.

While thus he reminds his people of their degeneracy, he bids them prepare a trench round his altar. He commands them to fill the trench with water; to pour it on the sacrifice and on the wood. Ahab and all Israel are full of anxious expectation, and wait the event in solemn silence. And now, when God's appointed hour of the evening sacrifice was come, Elijah reverently approaches his altar, and, looking up to heaven, thus addresses the Almighty: "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things by thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again."

The invocations of the idolaters were tedious; those of Elijah were short, but effectual. He committed to God the charge of his Divine truth, his covenant, his

glory. Behold, the prayer of faith pierces the heavens, and irresistibly ascends to the throne of grace. Israel shall see that the God whom they had forsaken doth not slumber nor sleep. In an instant the fire descends from heaven—consumes the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and licks up the water that was in the trench. With what terror must an idolatrous king and people have beheld this amazing spectacle! How must they have trembled lest those devouring flames should light on their guilty heads as well as on the sacrifice of Elijah! However they might reject the mercy of their Creator, they could not but confess and adore his power. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is the God—the Lord, he is the God."

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### 39.—N A B O T H.

The vineyard of Naboth was near adjoining to the palace of Jezebel—happier would he have lived, if it had been situated in the wilderness. How often is wealth a snare both to the soul and to the life! The possessions of this Jezreelite are a perpetual cause of jealousy and envy to Ahab and to the inhuman partner of his throne. The vicinity of Naboth's vineyard makes it an object on which an evil eye fails not to rest, and awakens those covetous desires which can neither admit of satisfaction nor brook control.

Twice had the king of Israel been victorious over the Syrians—he returns home, to be oppressed and vanquished by the wayward desire of his neighbor's inheritance. In vain shall Ahab boast of subduing a foreign

enemy, while a domestic foe remains triumphant within his own breast.

The proposition, whether of purchase or exchange, was specious and plausible. Even the tyrant himself dares not invade those rights which long prescription had sanctioned, and which gave Naboth a more just title to this vineyard than himself had to the throne. Yet dares not Naboth comply with the wishes of his master; the Lord forbade him to alienate the inheritance of his fathers. The command of God was more binding to the conscientious Israelite than the requests or injunctions of Ahab. An equivalent was easy to be obtained; but what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or even wound his own conscience? The Divine ordinances took especial care to preserve for individuals and families their respective proportions in the land of promise. Nothing but extreme necessity allowed them to consign the inheritances to others; and *even then*, at the great year of jubilee, they reverted to the original owners. It was not without a spiritual import, that whosoever had once his part in the heavenly gift was directed to keep that safe which was committed to his trust. Ahab well knew the positive nature of the restriction, and yet he scrupled not to say, "Give me thy vineyard."

The innocent Naboth must now either displease his king or disobey God. He prefers conscience to policy; he fears not them that kill the body; whether in death or life, he resolves to hold fast his integrity. Ahab cannot but see that the Divine prohibition alone interfered with his desires; and yet he goes down to his house heavy and displeased—he throws himself on his bed—he refuses to take sustenance. How ill can a proud heart endure contradiction! The monarch of Israel, the conqueror of Syria, the vanquisher of him who brought two and thirty tributary kings into the field of battle, is

a prey to anger, to grief, to pining sickness, because he cannot possess the vineyard of Naboth. O the insatiable desires of covetousness! O miserable Ahab, who, in the midst of royal splendor and most signal victories, art lost to all enjoyment while one trivial wish remains unsatisfied!

Corrupt as was the heart of Ahab, he fears to make use of either fraud or violence for the accomplishment of his designs. The king of Israel is a mere novice in wickedness, when compared with his Zidonian wife. Jezebel approaches the bed where her lord abandoned himself to the petulance of childish sorrow. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." She chides the pusillanimity of her husband, and persuades him that his power is fettered if he regards the laws of justice. She demands his royal signet—she frames a letter in his name to the elders of Jezreel—she bids them proclaim a fast, suborn false witnesses against Naboth, accuse him of blasphemy and treason, and consign him to instant death. Such is the price which Naboth must receive for his envied possession!

Who can without indignation contemplate the impious Jezebel naming a fast? The enemies of God can yet turn religion to their own advantage. She was not ignorant that amongst the Israelites blasphemers were punished with death; she knew their manner was to expiate a sin of this crying nature by public humiliation; that two witnesses were necessary to convict the offender. All this she urged to her own purpose. There is no mischief so diabolical as that which is masked with piety. Villany is then redoubled, and the guilt of murder itself receives a deeper dye.

But shall the rulers of Jezreel tamely acquiesce in these inhuman proceedings? Shall they not shudder at

the idea of being accomplices in such wickedness? The Lord, who forbade Naboth to alienate the inheritance of his fathers, forbade them also to frame a perjury, to belie the truth, to abet corruption, to condemn the guiltless. Alas! the depravity of Israel was extreme; they whose office called them to the punishment of crimes were most eager to offend; they who were called to the administration of justice were not afraid to shed innocent blood. Jezebel well knew whom she addressed—she found the ready obedience which she expected. A fast is proclaimed—the offender is summoned before his impious judges—false witnesses rise up—the magistrates rend their garments, to testify their horror at Naboth's crime and their regret on account of its consequences. The blameless man is dismissed to instant execution; his vineyard, forfeited by his imaginary crimes, descends not to his children, who probably shared the fate of their father, (2 Kings, 9:26;) the remorseless tyrant arises from his bed, goes down to the vineyard of Naboth, and takes immediate and unmolested possession.

How often does God, in his extreme displeasure, permit the sinner to effect the purposes of a wicked heart! The temporary success of guilt seems to argue that heaven and earth befriend it; till the slow but sure retribution, bursting on the head of the offender, proclaims at once the justice and the power of Jehovah. While Ahab is rejoicing in his new acquisition, and promising himself convenience and pleasure, he beholds Elijah sent to him from God with denunciations of vengeance. How does the king's countenance change at once! With what paleness in his cheek, what consternation in his eye, doth he behold the unwelcome prophet! What a tumult of agonizing passions is in his soul while his tongue faintly utters, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

How great is the power of conscience! Elijah and Ahab had parted as friends; the king knew himself indebted to the interposition of the man of God for those refreshing showers which had revived the hopes of Israel, but now his heart told him that he had nothing to expect but frowns from heaven. His continued idolatry, now seconded with blood, could not but make him odious to the Lord and to his prophet; he felt that himself was an enemy to God, and therefore he looks for neither peace nor friendship at the hand of Elijah. "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, *In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.*" Well does the prophet charge this murder on Ahab. He knew the only means by which Jezebel could obtain the vineyard of Naboth—he knew the consequences of intrusting his signet to a merciless woman. He was accessory to the crime before and after its perpetration. They who are in authority may offend as much by connivance as others by act; not only command, but even permission involves them in the sins which they might have prevented and would not. The Divine law punishes by retaliation—what Ahab hath done in cruelty he shall suffer in justice. Naboth, however, dies in his integrity—Ahab in his guilt. Naboth bleeds as a martyr—Ahab as an assassin.

Soon does the battle in Ramoth-Gilead afford opportunity for the infliction of this sentence. Neither the personal bravery of Ahab nor all his artful stratagems can avail to ward off the fatal blow. An arrow shot at random, but winged with Almighty vengeance reaches the heart of the disguised tyrant. O the just and mighty hand of that Divine providence which directs all things to the accomplishment of its own purpose! Too late doth Ahab now think of the warnings of Elijah—too late doth he regret that he ever listened to the voice of Jezebel or the flatteries of apostate prophets. His

guilty blood runs down into the midst of his chariot and pays the arrear to Naboth—the chariot is washed in the pool of Samaria—the dogs lick up the blood of the king of Israel. The honor of God is justified—the word of his prophet is fulfilled—the death of his servant is avenged. Righteous art thou, O Lord, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works!

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#### 40.—THE ASCENT OF ELIJAH.

Long and successfully hath Elijah fought the good fight of faith, and now, after his victories, God will send him a chariot of triumph. How full of joy was the soul of the prophet when he was in immediate expectation of blessedness! With what contempt did he look on that earth which he was so shortly to leave! With what rapture did he cast his eyes towards that heaven which was about to receive him!

As the last public act of his mission he visits the sons of the prophets—those whom God had yet selected from an apostate nation to keep alive his sacred truth.

Elisha resolves to accompany his master in all his journey. Thrice is he dissuaded from this act of zealous friendship—thrice he persists, in spite of entreaty and even command—Elijah, who expected his own assumption into heaven, knew not what witnesses might be permitted to behold it—his modest humility sought an unnoted and silent departure. But shall we not pardon the holy disobedience of this faithful disciple? "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee!" His master may be withdrawn from him, but he



will not depart from his master—he knew that the blessing was at the parting; and will not consent to it.

The sons of the prophets, both at Bethel and Jericho, are aware of what shall befall Elijah. His departure was an event of such importance that it was necessary to usher it in with tidings of preparation. Elisha has neither leisure nor inclination to hold converse with his brethren—his whole thoughts, as well as his eyes, are fixed on his departing master. Together do this wonderful pair arrive at the banks of Jordan—while, at an awful distance, fifty of the consecrated band pursue their footsteps, and gaze on them with respectful veneration. Miracles are not designed for obscurity. God will have witnesses to his marvellous acts. When the Savior of mankind arose from the dead, he was seen of more than five hundred brethren at once: when he ascended into heaven he arose from the Mount of Olives in the view of many eyes—eyes which were fixed on that astonishing sight with such intensesness as not to be recalled from it even by the approach of angels.

How exact was the parallel between those mighty prophets who were afterwards seen in glory with their Lord upon Mount Tabor! Both received visions on Horeb—to each of them God appeared there in fire, earthquakes, and other forms of terror. Both resorted to the wilderness—were sent on embassies from heaven to rebellious kings—dispensed miraculous food—were zealous for the extermination of idolatry—quenched the drought of Israel—divided the waters—finished their glorious labors near the banks of Jordan. The body of Elijah is *translated*—that of Moses is *hidden*—what one effects by his rod the other can accomplish by his mantle. With this he smites the river, and bids its waves retire before his feet, that he may without delay ascend his celestial chariot.

Now, when Elijah feels himself treading on his last

earth he no longer addresses his faithful associate with words of discouragement. "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken from thee." The holy prophet waits not long for a reply—out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit fall upon me." Elisha demands neither wealth, nor safety, nor ease, nor honor—he holds no blessing comparable with his master's spirit. No ambition mingled itself with the fervent request. He knew that the times into which he was fallen required no common exertions—he knew that the successor of Elijah must be endued with the spirit of miracles as well as that of prophecy. We cannot be too desirous of spiritual gifts, especially such as enable us to promote the glory of God in our respective stations. Our wishes are the touchstone of our hearts—such as we seek to be, we are. The worldling covets earthly things; the christian those which are Divine.

Elijah acknowledges the difficulty of the request, yet on one condition promises its completion—"If thou see me, when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee—if not, it shall not be so." The eye of Elisha must be fixed in attention, that his faith may be confirmed by the miracle he shall behold. If his thoughts are remiss, if his eye-lids slumber, his hopes are cancelled—there must be more than common vigilance in those who desire a double portion of heavenly graces.

Lo, while these servants of God are thus employed, the chariot of fire appears. Elijah is summoned from the world at a moment when he is instructing another, not praying for himself. There can be no better state in which the minister of Christ can be found by the messenger of dissolution, than that of diligence in his sacred calling. Attendance on these duties is no less pleasing to God than immediate devotion. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing!

O marvellous display of celestial splendor! Who, save Enoch and Elijah, was visibly taken up to eternal rest? What glory exceeded theirs, save that of Him, who by his own immediate power, and not by the ministry of angels, raised himself far above the heavens? He ascended as the Son—they as servants. He ascended as God—they as creatures. By their reception into heaven we are assured that even our *earthly* tabernacle may be admitted into the regions of joy—in their case instantaneously, by the command of God—in ours, after that mysterious exchange, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. Hereafter a day shall come, when the Son of man will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God. Then they who are alive and remain will be caught up together, with the raised bodies of saints, into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and to rejoice for ever in his glory. At that awful moment, when the elements shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be in flames around him, the christian will lift up his head rejoicing, for his redemption draweth nigh. Meantime, be it death, or fire, or whirlwind, the messenger is welcome which calls him to immortality.

Sudden and immediate as was the ascent of Elijah, his disciple can yet exclaim, as he beholds it, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" The glory to which the prophet is summoned cannot altogether bring comfort to those he leaves behind him. While he is yet between heaven and earth, the son of his adoption rends his clothes in a transport of sorrow, and pities the desolation of Israel.

The mantle of Elijah falls from him as he is rising. Elisha takes up the dear memorial of his glorified master. With this he had been invested when he received his Divine appointment to the ministry—it now comes

to him, as it were from heaven, for a possession. Sensible of its preternatural value, he casts it reverently about him—he approaches the waters of Jordan—“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” As if he had said, “Lord God, it was thy promise, by my departed master, that if I should see him in his ascent, a double portion of his spirit should rest upon me. I followed him with my eyes in that fire and whirlwind—now, therefore, O God, fulfill thy word unto thy servant—show some token unto me for good—make this the first proof of that miraculous power with which thou hast endued me. Let Jordan give way to me, as it gave to my master!” Immediately the stream, acknowledging as it were the same mantle, though in other hands, divides itself and yields a passage to the highly-favored Elisha.

The fifty sons of the prophets, who had witnessed these admirable events, are not slow to do obeisance to the man of God—but, full of zeal as well as reverence, they would fain seek for the departed saint, as if the Spirit of God had taken him to some remote mountain or valley—as if he had not been translated beyond the sphere of mortality. For awhile Elisha forbids them, till their vehemence extorts his unwilling permission. After three days' anxious search, the messengers return, abashed and weary; no longer are they deaf to conviction, no longer insensible of their master's happier lot. They who would *indeed* follow Elijah, must aspire to the heavenly Paradise; they must walk in the ways of his holy and constant obedience; they must imitate his fidelity, his patience, his undaunted courage, his fervent zeal; so shall God send the fiery chariot of death to translate them to the heaven of heavens, where with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant, they shall triumph in the fulness of everlasting glory.

## 41.—THE SHUNAMMITE.

“Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and there abide till ye go thence.” Such was the injunction delivered by our Lord to the earliest preachers of Christianity. Sometimes they were to experience the *persecution* which befell the prophets of old—sometimes they were to receive the same kind offices of *hospitality*. Elisha, in his progress throughout the land of Israel, finds at Shunem a pious family who knew how to value the privilege of having under their roof a man of God. With this venerable pair (whose names are lost, while their virtues are recorded) the prophet was received in the name of a prophet—he was welcomed as a friend—he was honored as a father.

The Shunammite, a wealthy and religious matron, finding that the duties of Elisha’s public character called him often near her dwelling, requests her husband to prepare for their guest a place of reception suited to the simplicity and holiness of his character. That holiness made her ambitious of his friendship—she sought for no other recompense than his prayers.

Blessed of God is that man who in the partner of his life finds an help meet for him in the way towards heaven. The request is no sooner made than granted. The tumult of a numerous family was unfit for the quiet meditations of a prophet—retirement was best adapted to one who held familiar converse with his God.

Elisha is not so fastidious as to neglect this friendly offer of accommodation. He gladly takes up his abode with persons of so much worth; and pleased with his own quiet repose and their hospitable attention, sends his servant Gehazi with a message expressive of his satisfaction and gratitude. “Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care—what is to be done for

thee? Wilt thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" An ingenuous disposition cannot receive favors without purpose of return. Elisha, who had not been wanting in spiritual duties, gives the Shunammite her choice of a temporal recompense.

But how shall the prophet find such favor in a profligate court as to promise his influence with the king in behalf of merit? The time was when his illustrious predecessor was met with words of anger and defiance—"Hast thou found me, O mine *enemy*?" But now the recent miracle wrought by Elisha in favor of Jehoram (whose armies he had relieved when fainting with thirst, and crowned with unexpected victory) gives him no difficulty of access to the throne. Faulty as was the son of Ahab, he honored the prophet of God; if the Shunammite desire any token of royal favor, she shall need no other solicitor than Elisha. There cannot be a better office, nor one more becoming a prophet, than to speak in behalf of the dumb, to befriend and patronise the oppressed, to win greatness to the protection of innocence.

The good matron is not insensible of Elisha's kindness, but modestly declines accepting it—"I dwell among mine own people. Thy courtesy is great in itself, but not useful to me. I live quietly in a contented obscurity, out of the reach either of the glories or cares of a court—free from wrongs, free from envy. Not so high as to provoke an evil eye; not so low as to be trodden on. My neighbors are my friends—my friends are my protectors—and, if I should be so unhappy as to meet with injurious treatment, would not fail to be my advocates. Thy proffered favor is for those who covet grandeur or groan under oppression—I do neither—I dwell among mine own people." O Shunammite, who can hear of thine happy condition, of thy peaceful contentment, without admiration and applause!

If the world afford any perfect felicity, it is in a middle estate, equally distant from penury and from excess—it is in a calm freedom, a secure tranquillity, a thankful enjoyment of ourselves and all that is ours.

But, alas, by how frail a tenure do we hold the best of earthly privileges? how long is the Shunammite thus blessed with peace? The day is not far distant when she shall throw herself, a miserable suppliant, at the feet of the king of Israel, deprived by famine and tyranny of all those possessions which afforded her such comfort. They who seem to stand securely are not exempt from danger—no man can say that he shall not need the protection of friends. Her suit would have found no acceptance, had not Gehazi, in the absence of Elisha, interceded for her with the king, and performed that office of friendship which was not accepted from his master.

Even now, in her more prosperous days, the Shunammite was not exempt from sorrow. She was childless; she was a stranger to that tender joy which fills the maternal bosom. Elisha shall now bring her glad tidings, and greet her with the promise of a blessing she deemed incredible. "Thou shalt embrace a son."

How bounteous is the mercy of God, who limits not his favors to our thoughts, but gives us benefits more than we presume to ask, more than we even dare expect! The holy matron doubts, from excess of joy—"Nay, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid!" She well knew that the prophet was incapable of wilful falsehood; but she thought it possible that a trial of her faith might be intended, not a positive assertion of such welcome import! Yet, lo, the promise is fulfilled; at the time appointed the Shunammite bears a son. They who have mourned under her affliction can best conjecture her transports. The child grows up, and is now able to attend the delighted father in his

rural occupations, and to share the "joy of harvest." O the instability of human happiness! The hot beams of the sun beat upon that head which too much care had made delicate. The child complains to his father of his pain; he consigns him to the care of a tender mother. At noon her son expires on the bosom which had preserved his infant-life; to which he had so often been clasped in maternal fondness.

The Shunammite hath lost her child; her faith she hath not lost. Passion deprives her not of wisdom. With a presence of mind beyond all praise she conceals her anguish; she demands permission of her husband to repair to Mount Carmel; she hastens to the feet of Elisha.

The man of God sees her afar off, and anxiously sends Gehazi to inquire after her welfare and that of her family. She has no words for the *messenger* of Elisha; no ear shall receive her complaint but that of the prophet. The long-suppressed sorrow bursts forth as she embraces those venerable knees: "Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, *Do not deceive me?* O thou servant of God, had I with undue importunity solicited the blessing I have lost, had I wearied heaven with petulant exclamations, I might have imagined that the gift was bestowed on me in anger. I might have looked forward to some melancholy reverse of fortune. But since thy prayers, not my complaints, ascended to the throne of mercy, since they were heard and answered, was I to expect this aggravation of torment? Was not the *want* of a son less grievous than the loss? Was not barrenness itself more tolerable than such a deprivation? Did I receive my child for no other purpose than that I might lament him? O thou man of God, let that same intercession which procured me the object of my love, restore him to my arms; let not my veneration for thee be repaid with such exquisite misery.



Hasten, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to console a distracted mother ; as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

O noble faith of the Shunammite, not to be discouraged by death itself, raising up her heart to an expectation of that life which in the eye of nature had been irrevocable, impossible ! O infinite goodness of the Almighty, which would not suffer such faith to be frustrated—which chose rather to reverse the laws of nature, to raise a body from death, to recall a departed spirit, than that the confidence of a believing heart should be disappointed ! We adore and praise thee, O God, for the gifts and graces bestowed on these thy holy prophets—glorious fellow-laborers in the vineyard, through whose powerful intercession with thee such miracles were displayed to mankind—who by faith wrought righteousness, obtained promises, escaped the edge of the sword, reprov'd idolatrous kings, caused water to spring from the earth, and fire to descend from the skies—through whose prayers women received their dead raised to life again—who had one mantle, one spirit—who ascended one Carmel, one heaven !



#### 42.—NAAMAN.

Greatness can secure no man from calamity. Naaman was a great warrior, an honorable courtier, the distinguished favorite of his sovereign, but he was a leper ; and under the pressure of this loathsome sickness all his valor, dignity, renown, victories, seem only an aggravation of his sorrow. The God of Israel looked on

this Syrian with an eye of pity, and his Divine providence pointed out the means of deliverance.

The captivity of a poor Hebrew female effects this astonishing work. How good is it to acquaint our children with the mercy of God! Many shall hear it and fear, and shall put their trust in the Lord. Removed from the land of her nativity, reduced to servitude, a stranger in a strange country, this daughter of Israel forgets not Jehovah or his servant. "Would God my Lord were with the prophet in Israel, for he would heal him of his leprosy."

The word was not spoken in vain. The king of Syria delays not to send his favorite with letters to the king of Israel, requiring the cure from his hands. The Syrian imagined that what a subject could do a sovereign might command: proudly does he signify his wishes, without deigning to point out the means whereby they may be effected. "Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold I have herewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayst recover him of his leprosy."

Jehoram rends his clothes in terror and amazement. "Am I God," saith he, "to kill, and to make alive?" To require that of a mortal which is proper only to the Almighty, is a manifest derogation from that power which belongeth unto God. Had Jehoram been truly religious, the injury done to his Maker would have more affected him than his own personal danger. He was not unacquainted with the virtue of Elisha's prayers—he had himself experienced their efficacy—yet must that service be *proffered* which ought to have been instantly and earnestly *requested*. "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

We must not set too great a value on our own dignity where we expect a benefit. Naaman comes richly attended, with his troop of servants and horses, and waits

in his chariot at the door of Elisha. The prophet receives him not under his roof, nor does he even go forth to do honor to this illustrious stranger. He will make trial both of his faith and his humility. "Go, wash in Jordan seven times, and thou shalt be clean."

Naaman departs in transports of fury—he considers the word as uttered in scorn. "Can water cleanse from leprosy? Is Jordan more medicinal than other streams? Am I come thus far to be insulted by an Israelite? Is this the event of my journey and the letters of my king? Could this prophet find none but Naaman to treat with indignity? Had he meant seriously, why did he not condescend to come forth to me? Why did he not touch me with his hand, and bless me with his prayers, and heal me with his blessing? Is my misery fit for his derision? If water could remove it, why did I leave my native country? Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" Folly and pride strive for mastery in the carnal heart, and it is hard to say which is most predominant. The natural man is altogether led by his outward senses—judges of all objects by the mere appearance—acquaints not himself with God—adheres obstinately to his own false principles—disdains the supposed inferiority of others—upbraids them with proud and insulting boasts of his imagined excellence. To such a man the doctrine, the services, the ordinances of Christ are objects of contempt and ridicule. He looks on Jordan with Syrian eyes, one drop of which, set apart by Divine ordination, has more real virtue, more saving efficacy, than all the waters of Abana and Pharpar.

Happy are they who, whatever be the station of the adviser, disdain not to listen to wholesome admonition. The servants of Naaman prove his best and most valuable friends. They fear not to approach him in the height of his indignation. "My father, if the prophet had bid

thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, *Wash and be clean?*” These men consulted not the passion but the welfare of their lord; they would rather advise than flatter—rather exhort him to good than follow him to evil. Since it was a prophet from whom he received the injunction, they entreat him not to despise it. They alledge that the simplicity of the proposed remedy was no argument against its efficacy while the power of him who prescribed it was supernatural. They tell him that the virtue of the cure depended on his own faith and obedience, not on the outward means suggested by Elisha. They persuade, and prevail. Naaman goes down, at their earnest persuasion, and dips himself seven times in Jordan. Next to God and the prophet, he may thank his attendants that he is no longer a leper. His unjust fury has not prevented his recovery; the word of Jehovah and of his consecrated servant stands sure, in spite of mortal petulance and presumption. Long might Naaman have washed there in vain if Elisha had not sent him: many a leper had bathed in those waters and remained unclean. It is the ordinance of God which gives effect to what in itself is weak and inadequate to its purpose.

Naaman departed in rage; he returns filled with humility and gratitude. His heart is no less purified from turbulent passions than his body from sickness. He returns not to the royal court either of Benhadad or Jehoram; he will not even make his family partakers of his joy till he has presented himself before that holy prophet, once the object of indignation, now of reverential love. The man of God admits the recovered Syrian, though he refused to see the leper. Purposely did he decline the former interview, that he might share no part of the praise with his Maker—that he might hear this noble confession in its full force, “Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.”

But while Naaman thus does homage to the Author of his cure, he will not forget the instrument. Richly furnished with silver, and gold, and raiment, he will not confine himself to barren acknowledgments. Some testimony of his thankfulness he is anxious to leave behind him, though all earthly recompense fall short of the benefit received. "I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant."

The holy prophet, with a degree of honest vehemence, refuses to accept these free-will offerings of gratitude; not that he deemed it unlawful, but in the present instance inexpedient. He would have his new convert see cause to be more enamored of true piety, which teaches her children to contemn those riches and honors that are adored by worldlings; and would impress upon his mind that the gifts of God are neither to be *purchased* nor *rewarded* with money.

Naaman acquiesces and departs. He goes, resolved to profess himself an Israelite in religion. All the court of Syria shall know that he sacrifices on consecrated earth to the God of Israel; they shall hear him protest that he has neither heart nor knee for Rimmon. If he must go into the house of that idol, it shall be of necessity, not of choice; his duty to his master shall carry him, not his devotion to his master's god. Yet had not Naaman deemed this a fault he would not have requested pardon. His heart told him that a perfect convert should have abhorred the temple, the sight of Rimmon; that his obedience to an earthly master should not draw him to any secondary observance of idolatry—that a sincere detestation of sin was utterly inconsistent with this temporizing submission.

Far, therefore, is Naaman from being an example, save of weakness; he is yet more than half a Syrian—he is a babe, unskilful in the word of righteousness. The prophet, who would have rebuked an *Israelite*, will not ob-

scure the dawn of a heathen's conversion. He dismisses him in the accustomed terms of valediction. They are parted.

Gehazi cannot thus take his leave. His heart is in the treasure of Naaman. He deems his lord frantic for refusing the proffered gifts. He runs with guilty speed that he may recover a part of the booty. Naaman sees him, and spares not to humble himself before the servant of Elisha. The half-breathless messenger utters his plausible fiction—receives a boon beyond his utmost wishes—returns with the glittering load, and, when he has secreted it, stands boldly before his master. O Gehazi, couldst thou so long have poured water on the hands of Elisha, and still be ignorant of that eye of Providence which was ever fixed upon thy heart? Didst thou not know that thy paths were overlooked by invisible witnesses? Couldst thou hope to delude God and his prophet? Hear then thy sentence, and be convinced to thy confusion: "Thou wouldst take part of Naaman's *treasure*, thou shalt inherit his loathsome *infirmity*. As a monument of thy guilt, and as a proof that God is not mocked, the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and to thy seed for ever."



#### 43.—J E H U.

For a long series of years had the crimes of Ahab's family caused horror and consternation in Israel. At last the measure of their enormities is full. The Divine mercy will be scorned and insulted no longer. Reproofs, admonitions, judgments, deliverances, have all failed of

their effect. What remains, but that the offended justice of heaven take its course? Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord. It is time for thee to work, for they have made void thy law. Arise, O God, maintain thine own cause. The presumption of them that hate thee increaseth more and more.

The voice of inspiration had long since commanded Elijah to anoint Jehu king over Israel. The *disciple* of Elijah was no doubt commissioned by his master to accomplish whatever his own sudden translation to glory had left unfinished. What could be a more convenient time for this purpose, than when the army of Israel were assembled under the command of Jehu, in the absence of the wounded Jehoram. A moment now lost might have been irrecoverable. Elisha sends a messenger in haste to Ramoth-Gilead to pour the consecrated oil on the head of the unsuspecting warrior.

No sooner is the young prophet arrived at the place of his destination, than he calls Jehu from his assembled companions. The wisdom of God fixed on a moment when the public view of a sacred messenger, and the mysterious nature of the conference he demanded, might prepare the hearts of these commanders of Israel to the expectation of some great design.

Now shall the blood of the prophets be avenged on Jezebel; the tyranny and idolatry of the house of Ahab shall bring destruction on their heads. Ahab shall have no posterity, Jezebel no tomb. The long-threatened, long-delayed vengeance, when it seemed forgotten by God and man, falls at once in all its terrors on this impious family.

The prophet has fulfilled his ministry, and is gone. Jehu returns to his impatient companions, who cannot for a moment restrain their curiosity. "Is all well? Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?" The prophets of God were to these idolatrous Israelites like

meteors—their appearance seemed to portend only destruction. While the priests of *Baal* sacrifice, all is well; but when the servant of Jehovah presents himself, their guilt vainly attempts to shelter its terrors under the affectation of contempt.

The message was not given to Jehu for concealment. The habit of the stranger had sufficiently declared him a prophet. Their general acquaintances them with all the circumstances of the momentous interview—tells them of the prediction—presents himself to them as their lawful sovereign, anointed by the direction of God to drive the race of usurpers from a throne polluted by their crimes.

Scarcely had the captains of the host heard the conclusion of the story, ere they rise from their seats, moved by some Divine impulse, and instantly seize their arms: a throne is raised for Jehu—the leaders of Israel vie with each other in their zeal to do him homage—they proclaim with sound of trumpet, "JEHU IS KING!" Mad as they pronounce the prophet, at his word they adventure their lives and allot the royal dignity. God gives a secret authority to his despised servants; they who hate their persons will yet respect the truths they are commissioned to impart. Even scorners cannot but reverence the faithful ambassadors of Christ.

Jehu is no less wise than valiant. He determines to surprise Jehoram in the palace of Jezreel before any messenger can carry intelligence of his inauguration. While the trumpets are yet sounding he ascends his chariot.

Ahaziah, king of Judah, too nearly connected with Jehoram in manners as well as blood, was at this time feasting in Jezreel. The watchman on the tower espies a company. All was supposed to be at peace in Israel—Judah was so closely joined to it in bands of amity, that the two monarchs were under one roof, as friends and



brethren—yet an alarm is hastily given. Jehoram knows not whether the approaching multitude consists of Syrians who have recovered Ramoth, or of his own vanquished subjects, or of conspirators against his person and throne. The messengers he sends to meet them are forcibly detained. The king of Israel forgets his wounds and goes himself in search of death.

Yet when he sees the captain of his armies, hope contends with fear and apprehension—“*Is it peace, Jehu? What means this sudden journey? Is the army defeated by the Syrians? Have they retaken Ramoth-Gilead? Has the dispersion of the enemy left thee no room to display thy valor? Or is thy speed occasioned by some unexpected misfortune?*”

There scarcely needs an answer. Fury sparkles in the eyes of Jehu; his look is the harbinger of destruction to his adversary—“*What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?*”

“*Why speakest thou of peace with men, inhuman tyrant, who hast so long waged war with God? Thine accursed mother trained thee up to blood, and inured thee to impious idolatry. Her crimes, her cruelties are thine—thou art corrupted by her abominations; thou art enchanted by her sorceries. The just God, whom thou and thy parents have daringly blasphemed, sends thee by me, this last message of his vengeance.*”

While he speaks, his hand is drawing the fatal arrow from his quiver. Too late doth Jehoram turn his chariot and flee. Too late does the traitor to God complain of Jehu's treason. The weapon is directed to his heart, it is fixed there by the unerring arm of Divine retribution.

How just are the judgments of God! It was in the field of Naboth that Jehu met with Jehoram. That prophecy, which he had heard pronounced by Elijah to Ahab, his own hand has now accomplished. The blood

of Jehoram falls on that ground which had been tyrannously seized by the father, and which the son had neither the piety nor the justice to restore.

It was time for Ahaziah to flee. Long since should he have withdrawn himself from the crimes of the house of Ahab. He partakes in their sin; he partakes in their punishment. The impious alliance brings its too well-deserved wages. The king of Judah, who had accompanied Jehoram in his idolatries, accompanies him also in his death.

What now shall become of Jezebel? Will she not betake herself to sackcloth and ashes, when she hears of the untimely fate of her son, the degradation of her family, the success of her prosperous rival? Will she not cast herself as a suppliant at the feet of Jehu, and implore him to spare her life, (though sullied with such various guilt,) in pity to her age and the dignity with which she was invested? Will she not petition for her yet surviving children? Far otherwise. Her proud heart is incapable of submission. She collects her haughty spirits, and, instead of humbling her soul by repentance, or preparing for instant death, she seeks to daunt the courage of this conqueror by the sudden beams of majesty. She looks down upon him with insolent disdain—challenges him as a traitor—calls to his remembrance the short-lived glories of Zimri, who slew his master—forgets that her own life is in his hands, and that she has no dependence but on his clemency.

The resolution of Jehu was not to be shaken by a painted face or an opprobrious tongue. He looks up and commands the fawning minions of Jezebel, who stood around her, to cast her down headlong. Who shall trust the venal services of a treacherous heart? Long had these eunuchs bent their knee in humble obsequiousness to the queen of Israel—now, at the call of a triumphant enemy, they forget her royalty and their own

allegiance, and consign her, as willing executioners, to her miserable fate. Such was the fall of pride—so perished the insolent, the idolatrous, the sanguinary Jezebel!

Death puts an end to all displeasure. Jehu, who spared not the life of this impious woman, will not forget her sepulture. Though the tranquillity of his kingdom and his personal safety would not suffer him to pardon her, he commands her to be interred as a Zidonian princess, the daughter, wife and mother of kings. The dogs have already prevented him in his purpose. The word of Elijah is fully verified—the dreadful sentence is literally fulfilled—the blood of Naboth and of the prophets is fearfully required.

Righteous art thou, O God, and just are thy judgments!



#### 44.—A T H A L I A H .

Now is Jehu peaceably settled on the throne of Israel. Mankind no longer tremble at the enormities of the house of Ahab. The sacrilegious rites of Baal are banished out of the land. The sword of Divine justice returns into its scabbard—it is at rest—it is still.

Unambitious of further conquests, the king forbears to take advantage of those confusions into which the neighboring empire is thrown by the death of Ahaziah. He has finished the task for which the prophetic voice appointed him—he has prospered in the work he was commissioned to perform. Idolatry and tyranny are heard of no more. Had he but *reformed* as well as restored the worship of Jehovah—had he destroyed the images of Jeroboam as well as the idols of Ahab, the

blessing of the house of David would have fallen on his head and on his remote descendants.

But, alas, the heart of Jehu was not perfect with God. He fears to deviate from the fatal policy of his predecessors. He dares not commit his way unto the Lord—he dares not bid the tribes go up to worship at Jerusalem. Yet shall his obedience, partial as it is, not fail of a temporal reward. Four generations of his posterity shall sit on the throne of Israel before the family of Jehu is extinct, like that of Omri, of Baasha, and of the son of Nebat.

In the meantime what scenes of horror are passing in the kingdom of Judah! How truly is Athaliah the sister of Jezebel, in soul as well as alliance! To her care the sceptre had been committed by her son when he departed to assist Jehoram in war. Ahaziah was fallen—his brethren were no more—they perished by the hand of Jehu. See 2 Kings, 10 : 13, 14. Who would not pity the sorrows of the disconsolate Athaliah? Who would not imagine, that when the first transports of her grief were over she would seek with avidity her only remaining comfort, the society of those dear and innocent children whose early orphanage called for a more than common share of tenderness from the mother of their slaughtered parent? She *does* indeed betake herself to the place of their abode—she repairs thither to feast her eyes with death and assassination. O the cruelty of an ambitious heart! To secure herself in the royal dignity the barbarian can command, can even witness a deed of so atrocious a nature as is altogether unparalleled in the annals of mankind.

In the horrors of a siege, in the ravages of famine, the hands of miserable women have fastened on their offspring; alas! here was nothing but the craving of pride—nothing but an execrable thirst for sovereignty  
“Even the sea-monsters draw out the breast, they give

suck to their brood ;” even the lion, who fills his holes with prey and his dens with rapine, takes the spoil and tears it in pieces for his young ones. *Their* cruelties are tender mercies in comparison with those of the daughter of Omri. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her—her eyes do fail with tears, because the children and the sucklings perish in the streets of Jerusalem. How is the faithful city covered with a cloud of sorrow! It was full of judgment, righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper, her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

Wicked Athaliah! dost thou think that God has forgotten his servant David, and the terms of his holy covenant? Shall thy guilty zeal for Baal, or thine inordinate lust of empire, root out all the posterity of the son of Jesse? The man after God’s own heart shall have a lineal heir to sit in his throne when thou and thy father’s house shall have perished—when the records of thy guilt shall alone preserve thee from oblivion.

Happy was it for Israel that the crown disdained not to hold alliance with the temple. The sister of Ahaziah thought it no degradation to her dignity to become the wife of Jehoiada the high-priest. No sooner is this royal matron acquainted with the recent massacre than she hastens into the chamber of death. Athaliah had already retired, assured that the bloody work was accomplished. Jehosheba perceives a spark of life not utterly extinguished in the heart of the infant Joash—she boldly takes him from among the slain—she recalls his departing spirit—she commits him to the protection of her husband. God looks down from heaven upon the stratagems of tyrants, and confounds them in their own devices. The word hath gone forth to David, “Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne;” in vain shall earth or hell conspire to frustrate it.

Six years does Judah groan under the tyranny of an idolatrous woman—so long is the lawful sovereign concealed in the recesses of the temple, into which the worshippers of Baal disdained to enter. Jehoiada now thinks fit to assert that title which had been lost in usurpation. Ambition might have prompted him to continue Joash in obscurity, and advanced his wife, the daughter of Jehoram, to the throne; his heart has far other objects in its view. He assembles the scattered remains of those servants of God on whose zeal and piety he could depend; he gives every one his charge; he disposes all things for the safety of the prince, the punishment of Athaliah, the prevention of tumult, the establishment of the royal authority on the head of Joash in peace and joy.

All things are now ready for the solemnity. Every heart pants for the approach of the long-concealed sovereign to his inauguration. Every one vows to devote his life to the service of his lawful king. At length Jehoiada presents him to the assembly in the temple. Scarcely can the multitude refrain from shouting aloud too soon. One traces in his countenance the features of his father Ahaziah—another those of Jehoram—while the more aged warriors dwell fondly on his fancied resemblance to their beloved master, the great and good Jehoshaphat. All find in his face the natural impressions of majesty—all read in it the most auspicious promise of future happiness. Jehoiada, with joyful haste, proceeds to his coronation. The holy oil is poured on his head—the diadem is placed on his brows—the book of the law is presented to his hand. By these instructive ceremonies he was taught to entertain a proper sense of the calling of God, the dignity of his own character, and the importance of that Divine word by which all his actions should be regulated.

Now do the people clap their hands and burst out

with loud acclamations of joy. From the recesses of her palace Athaliah hears the shouts of the multitude, the noise of trumpets, the tumult of applause. Instantly she repairs to the temple, on whose threshold her feet had probably never trodden. Those honest hearts which had devoted themselves to their king and their God had agreed in religious secrecy. No circumstance had transpired. Tyranny itself was devoid of suspicion. Athaliah feared not to approach those hallowed walls alone and unattended.

What a spectacle for an impious usurper! She hears the multitude exclaiming, "God save the king!" She sees the heir to the kingdom sitting on his throne, invested with all the insignia of royalty, guarded by a faithful band of soldiers, proclaimed with trumpets, hailed by the joyful shouts of the people.

As if that voice of hers might command all hearts, all hands, she rends her robes and cries, "Treason, treason!" O Athaliah, of whom dost thou complain? *Thine* was the treason, theirs is justice. The true son of Ahaziah, whom thy cruelty sought to number with the dead, now sits on his father's throne. The time is now come when the royal blood of Judah, shed by thine hand, shall be requited—when thy life shall justly pay the forfeit of thine unnatural conspiracy.

There needs no regularity of trial. Jehoiada, the priest of God, the near kinsman and protector of the young monarch, by no undue exercise of his delegated authority consigns the criminal to justice. Not a sword is drawn in her behalf—no heart pities, no eye bewails her. The God of righteousness maketh inquisition for innocent blood. The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction; suddenly doth he consume, perish, and come to a fearful end.

Every thing now wears the face of tranquillity. Again is Judah restored to itself, after so long a deprivation.

The people scarcely believe their own eyes for joy and wonder. Jehoiada takes advantage of these favorable impressions. He employs his influence for the public good. He calls upon the people to renew the covenant with their God at the solemn moment when they vow allegiance to their king. Their zeal casts down the temples and altars of idolatry—Jehovah is the sole object of religious adoration—Baal is destroyed out of Judah as well as Israel.

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#### 45.—HEZEKIAH AND SENNACHERIB.

The Assyrian monarch triumphs in the palaces of Samaria and Jezreel. The nobles of Israel are led away in chains, and consigned to servitude and exile. That once flourishing kingdom is come to a fearful end, and is so vanished in its dissipation that no man could ever afterwards say, "This was Israel." O terrible example of vengeance on that peculiar people whom God had chosen for himself out of the world! All had beheld their miraculous deliverances—all had witnessed their crimes—all shall tremble at their punishment.

Israel is gone, Judah is scarcely in being. Who can behold without pity the languishing remains of the kingdom of David? Yet even now out of these dying embers doth God raise up a glorious light to his forlorn church, and blesses his people with the virtues of Hezekiah. Scarcely can we imagine a state of greater misery than that in which Jerusalem was left at the death of the impious Ahaz. Hezekiah revives the hope of Judah; the impiety of the father is lost in the holiness of the



son; a new life, as it were, is given to the disconsolate remnant of the people of God.

Now does the religious prince exert himself in the necessary work of public reformation. The high places are removed, the idols are destroyed, the groves are cut down, the holy temple is purified, the priests are restored to their offices, the sacrifices are duly performed, the order of God's service is established, the long-neglected passover is kept with due solemnity. In a word, all things are ordered as if David himself were alive again in this blessed heir to his crown and his piety. O Judah, happy in thy king! O Hezekiah, happy in the restoration of thy people! For three hundred years the man after God's own heart had no so perfect a representative. The devotions of the best princes of Judah were in some measure defective; now the zeal of Hezekiah brings back the worship of God to its original purity. Even the brazen serpent of Moses, once the type of a future Savior, is broken in pieces, because the degeneracy of a wicked age had converted it into an idol.

Since the heart of Hezekiah was thus upright with God, we cannot wonder that the Lord was with him—that in prosperity and in adversity he was guided and supported by omnipotence.

Fourteen years does the pious king enjoy the blessings of peace; at length he must prepare for scenes of a different nature. The king of Assyria comes up against the fenced cities of Judah and takes them. Jerusalem only remains, surrounded by a host of enemies, robbed of all its wealth by the former exactions of Sennacherib, helpless, friendless, comfortless, looking forward to the utmost extremity of hostile fury.

The captains of the Assyrian army demand a conference. What blasphemies, O God, doth the insolent Rabshakeh utter against thee! How doth he insult thine anointed servant! How doth he tempt thy people with

base offers of advantage! Above all, how daringly doth he profane thy holy name, and plead thine own commission, to bereave them of their last, their dearest, their only hope! "Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, *Go up against this land, and destroy it.*"

In vain does Eliakim implore the haughty Rabshakeh to make use of a language unknown to the people. That tongue is best suited to his purpose which may do the most extensive mischief. The humble request of Hezekiah's princes serves only to increase the insolence of the blasphemer. In accents familiar to the assembled multitude, he terrifies them with the mighty power of Sennacherib—he debases the force of Hezekiah—he allures them with brilliant promises—he discourages them with the impossibility of their deliverance—he sets before them the example of greater nations, vanquished by that sword which now was brandished over their heads. "Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad?"

Not a word is uttered from the walls of Jerusalem. All is hushed in silence. The injurious blasphemies of Rabshakeh meet with the reception they deserve from the faithful people of God. The boaster returns, exasperated at this contemptuous treatment, and denouncing the utmost extremity of vengeance.

Meanwhile the king of Judah has recourse to the Lord, and to his prophet. He sends his princes to Isaiah—he betakes himself to the house of prayer. Under that sacred roof, clothed in sackcloth, he pours out his complaint to the Almighty, he laments the indignities offered to his God. There, there is the refuge of all faithful hearts in the time of adversity. Isaiah sends a message to the king, which shall dry up his tears and turn his sorrow into joy. While Sennacherib is in the height of his triumphs, the prophet foresees his ruin, and while the tyrant thinks only of life and victory, passes on him the sentence of death.

The army of the king of Ethiopia claims the immediate attention of the proud Assyrian. He raises the siege of Libnah, and thinks to terrify Hezekiah by reiterated threats, and yet more daring blasphemies. Again does the holy prophet send to Hezekiah a message of comfort—again does he announce the approaching fall of Sennacherib. He declares that the arm of God shall be miraculously exerted for his people—that the earth shall bring forth spontaneous fruits—that peace and prosperity shall return to the land of Judah.

“Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy. His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire—and the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, and with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down which smote with a rod!”

Thus spake the prophet. The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of Assyria an hundred and fourscore and five thousand—and when the morning dawned, behold, they were all dead corpses. Thy crime, O Sennacherib, was enormous—thy punishment was terrible. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel—His almighty arm has cut off thy legions—take heed lest he spare not thee. Go now, and tell of the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad, of Sepharvaim, of Henah, and Ivah! Assert that the God of Judah is as one of these. Go and add this Deity to the number of thy conquests, and say that the God of Hezekiah, in whom he trusted, hath deceived him and graced thy triumphs!

How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war made trophies of Divine justice! How speedy, how mi-

raculous is this execution! No human arm shall have the glory of such a victory.

With shame and grief is the disappointed tyrant returned to Nineveh, leaving behind him the pride and strength of Assyria on the fields of death. Vengeance waits for him at home, and welcomes him to his palace. While he is performing his idolatrous worship in the temple of Nisroch, two of his own sons become his murderers. And he who had spurned all laws Divine and human, is reserved for the torment of this unnatural stroke, directed by the sacrilegious hands of his wretched and ill-taught children.

Thou art avenged, O God, thou art avenged of thine enemies. Whosoever strives with thee, meets with defeat, and shame, and destruction. The Assyrians are cut off, Rabshakeh (no doubt) among their number—Sennacherib is punished for his blasphemies—Jerusalem is rescued—Hezekiah rejoices—the nations wonder, and tremble. O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth them that are faithful, and plenteously rewardeth the proud doer.



#### 46.—HEZEKIAH AND ISAIAH.

O God, how dost thou correct them whom thou lovest! Who was so dear to thee in the throne of Judah as Hezekiah? Who so devoted to thy service? Yet, behold, he is no sooner relieved from a miserable siege, than he pants under a grievous sickness. While as yet he has no child to succeed him, the prophet Isaiah is sent to him with heavy tidings. "Set thine house in order—for thou shalt die, and not live." It is no small to-

ken of God's mercy, when he gives us warning of our end. We shall not profit by the gracious admonition if we make not preparation for our departure. They who have not a house, have yet a soul—no soul can without danger come unprepared before the all-righteous Judge. The neglect of this case is desperate. Set thy *soul* in order, O man, for thou shalt die, and not live.

Never till now was the word of Isaiah otherwise than welcome. Often had he been an ambassador of peace and deliverance—with equal fidelity he discharges the duties of his office when God calls on him to deliver a message of death. The pious king receives it with meekness and reverence—he utters no menace against the prophet—he betakes himself to heaven with lamentations and prayers—"I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart!" Couldst thou fear, O Hezekiah, that God had *forgotten* thine integrity? Dost thou doubt his remembrance of thy virtues, because he summons thee to glory and immortality? What is the object of thy mournful supplications? Thy royal ancestor hath given language to thy thoughts—"O let me live, and I shall praise thee, O God." From a natural man this wish might be expected—who cannot but wonder at it in a saint? His happiness begins when his life ceaseth—his misery ends when his earthly pilgrimage is over. He might be supposed therefore desirous to depart and be with God—ready to exclaim in all the fervor of devout affection, "O let me *die*, that I may *enjoy* thee!" Why then is Hezekiah appalled with the news of that death which even Pagans have welcomed? Certainly the best of men is not divested of human infirmity. As long as we remain in the body, we retain those feelings implanted in our nature—a love of life—a degree of terror at the thoughts of dissolution. But the mind of Hezekiah was not uninfluenced by nobler motives—he

regarded the prosperity of that church which he had restored from its ruins—he saw how much its safety would be endangered by his departure. His very tears said, “O God, thou knowest the eyes of the world are fastened on me, as one that hath abandoned idolatry and revived thy holy worship. I stand alone, in the midst of a wicked and faithless generation. If they see me cut off in the midst of my days, will not the heathen blaspheme? will they not triumph in my untimely extinction? Alas, what will become of thy church, to which my zealous services have been devoted? How soon will it be overgrown with superstition and heathenism? Lord, if thou callest me to thyself, have mercy on this thy vineyard. Let not the boar out of the wood root it up, let not the wild beast of the field devour it.”

Not a word of Hezekiah is uttered or a tear shed in vain. The king of Assyria came up to destroy his city and people—prayers and tears send him away in confusion. A more resistless tyrant came, not without authority, to bind him in chains of iron—prayers and tears take the spoil out of the hand of the mighty. Before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, the Lord of life and death speaks to him from heaven, “Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father—I have heard thy prayer—I have seen thy tears—behold, I will heal thee!”

And hast thou then, O God, so soon changed thy purpose? Was it not thine own message which thy prophet delivered to Hezekiah? If thou hadst designs of mercy and favor, why didst thou suffer him to say, “Thou shalt die, and not live?”

God is not a man, that he should repent—the message is changed; the Divine power and will are unchangeable. In the first instance, the king of Judah

was told what he had to expect from the nature of his disease—afterwards he was made acquainted with the success of his own fervent importunity. “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” left space for repentance and pardon to its inhabitants. He who said, “Thou shalt die,” can yet listen to the ardor of devotion which implored a longer life.

How wonderful is the goodness of heaven! While the tears of Hezekiah are yet streaming down his cheeks, while the prayer is scarcely spoken by his lips, God sends an answer of peace. He will not suffer his faithful servant to languish, even for an hour, in expectation of the threatened stroke. He has seen his ways and will heal him—within three days his feet shall stand in the courts of the house of the Lord—he who now weeps on the bed of sickness, shall sing a song of joy and thanksgiving in the temple. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come! With what cheerful hope should we approach that throne of grace, where never any petition is rejected, unless for the highest ultimate good! Lord, our best state is a state of uncertainty—thy wisdom hath judged it inexpedient for us to know the appointed period of our existence. Teach us therefore, O God of mercies, so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to thy heavenly wisdom!

The loving-kindness of God towards his servant ends not here. Hezekiah shall be blessed not only with *health* but *peace*. The proud Assyrian (not yet fallen a sacrifice to the ambition of his children) threatens another invasion. His late discomfiture rankles in his breast, and urges him to revenge—but the God of heaven maintains his own cause. “I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria—I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.” For *health*, under the infinite good-

ness of God, Hezekiah is indebted to his prayers—for *peace*, to the precious memory of his royal ancestor. To the man after his own heart had God pledged himself by a gracious promise—the word standeth sure—the Almighty fails not to remember his ancient mercies. The piety of David shall be a light to lighten the unborn—shall entail a blessing on future generations.

The sudden contradiction of the message causes a just difficulty in the assent—Hezekiah demands a sign, not because he distrusts, but that he may trust the more. “Lord, we believe, help thou our unbelief!”

The languishing monarch has his option. His father Ahaz was offered a sign, and refused it—Hezekiah asks a sign, and obtains it—“Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or back ten degrees?” As if heaven lay open to his choice, as if time itself were ready either to advance or retire for his confirmation; as if the laws of universal nature were in subjection to the faith of the servants of God.

Hezekiah fixes on that sign which is most difficult, most widely removed from the course of probability. The going back of the shadow was a convincing proof of that mighty power, the exertion of which was necessary to bring back the departing spirit of the king of Judah. “Nay, but let the shadow return *back* ten degrees!”

Shall we more wonder at the love of God towards Hezekiah, or the mighty faith of his prophet? “Isaiah cried unto the Lord—and the Lord brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.” No wonder the Chaldean sages repaired eagerly to Jerusalem to investigate so striking a prodigy. Whether the day was supernaturally lengthened, or whether the miracle were local on the sundial of Ahaz, the proof of Divine omnipotence was the same. The life of Hezekiah was hastening towards the night



of death—the voice of God recalls it. O Lord, thou wilt rather alter the course of heaven and earth, than suffer the faith of thy children to sink for want of thine assistance.

Now does the king of Israel repair with joy to the temple of God—now does he offer the sacrifice of grateful thanksgiving in the house where his honor dwelleth. “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being.”



#### 47.—JOSIAH.

Now is the throne of Judah, for the last time, the seat of purity and justice—now does that light once more shine, so soon to be succeeded by the deepest obscurity. The crimes of Manasseh and of his short-lived son have already cancelled all those lessons of piety which the precepts and the example of Hezekiah enforced for a time on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. All seems desperate—the Divine vengeance is advancing with hasty steps to inflict the threatened destruction—when the blow is for a while arrested by the piety of young Josiah.

Experience has in general demonstrated that the cares of government demand the utmost vigor of mental faculties in the ruler, and all those advantages which maturity of age and perfection of reason can bestow. “Wo unto thee, O land, whose king is a child!” Yet in the case of Josiah we find that God knows how to deviate from the ordinary course of his dispensations. There are instances in which a virtuous heart confers as much distinction on its possessor as

he can derive from the hoary head, that crown of glory. There have been illustrious characters, who, having lived a short time, fulfilled a long time—who proved to an admiring world that wisdom is as grey hairs unto men, and unspotted life as old age.

Even the minority of Josiah was not idle. No sooner was his heart capable of reflection, than he applied himself to seek after God—the first acts of his royal authority showed that he sought him not in vain. Examples are the best rules for the inexperienced—the king of Judah sets before him his royal ancestor David as the object of imitation. The word of truth is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his paths—with his whole heart he seeks the Lord God of his fathers. The testimonies of Jehovah are his delight and his counsellors

The good principles with which the pious king had stored his mind are early reduced to practice.

His dearest care is to purify Judah and Jerusalem from the impurities with which they abounded—the high places, the groves, the images, the altars of Manasseh and Amon, all are done away. Nothing is left unaccomplished which can show the pious king's detestation of idolatry.

No sooner is this important reformation effected than Josiah turns his thoughts to the restoration of the house of God. Many times had this venerable structure been made to suffer, through the rage of foreign invaders or the careless impiety of sacrilegious princes. How did the ruinous state of the hallowed pile bear witness to the past calamities and transgressions of Judah, when, in the true spirit of his father David, Josiah made proclamation for the repairing of the temple!

The freewill offerings of zealous piety are joyfully contributed—the high priest himself is delegated by Josiah to direct and superintend the execution of a work in which the welfare of religion is so deeply interested.

Never does the God of heaven withhold his blessing from the devout endeavors of his faithful servants. While the high priest Hilkiah was diligently restoring the temple to its state of perfection, he finds the book of the law of Moses. That authentic and original record was, by especial command of the great Legislator, appointed to be carefully kept within a safe shrine in the sanctuary. Some faithful priest, in the depraved times of idolatry, had removed the precious volume to a place of greater security—had withdrawn it from the eye of curiosity, from the hand of sacrilege; studious to preserve that ancient monument of Divine goodness from the fury of impious profanation. Some transcripts were doubtless extant—Josiah could not be unacquainted with the law of his God—but the whole body of these awful records, since the recent night of confusion, idolatry, and persecution, saw not the light till now. Hilkiah finds the long-lost treasure and transmits it to his royal master.

Josiah hears with grief and consternation those dreadful threatenings of judgment which the voice of Heaven denounced against idolatry. Guiltless himself, he yet trembled for his Judah—he rends his clothes, in fearful expectation of some national calamity. His eyes gush out with tears because men keep not the law of God.

But the sorrow of the pious youth loses not itself in inaction—he sends to inquire of the Lord for himself, for his people. Whence, O Josiah, is this deep perplexity! If thy fathers were idolatrous, hast thou not abandoned their sins? If thy people were once guilty, have they not expiated their crime by repentance? Are not all abuses carefully reformed? What mean these tears, this earnest solicitude? Too well does thy fear anticipate the message which the prophetess is commissioned to send thee. “Go, tell the man that sent you, Thus saith the Lord—*Behold, I will bring evil upon this place.*”

Evil awaits the guilty Jerusalem—all the vengeance foretold shall be accomplished. A moment's respite is granted in consideration of thy pious fidelity—but the measure of public iniquity is full—the predicted ruin must shortly take its course. It is enough for thee that thou shalt sleep in the tomb before the storm take place—thine eye shall not see what thy people shall feel—Judah shall become a curse, and Sion a desolation—but thine heart shall only suffer from the *expectation* of evil.

The humility and devotion of Josiah has exempted *himself* from vengeance—he leaves no expedient untried to procure the deliverance of his people. He causes those awful words which had made such an impression on his own heart, to be publicly and solemnly recited in the streets of Jerusalem. The assembly is universal. The priests, the prophets, the multitude are gathered together—the depravity has been general—the danger hangs over every head—the law of God shall sound in every ear. If the people do not imitate the piety of their king, they are not worthy to partake with him in his impunity. At all events they shall not want a great example to direct their national humiliation. The wise and good Josiah stands by the pillar of the temple (see 2 Kings, 11:14; and Judges, 9:6) and renews the solemn covenant with his God. The people cannot, dare not refuse to join in his devotions. In the midst of the horror they feel at the predictions of impending destruction, they will not withdraw their obedience from their king, and from their God. Josiah contents not himself with the *expressions* of fervent piety—his actions second his words. Whatever monuments remain of paganism are defaced by him with indignation—no endeavor is wanting to testify his zeal for that name of God which had been so profaned by the idolatry of his people. He burns the vessels of Baal, and puts down his impious priests—he strews the dust

of their idols in the brook Kidron—defiles Tophet, the scene of their abominations—takes away the horses and chariots dedicated to the sun—omits nothing which might appease the anger of God, renew the hearts of the people, perfect the reformation he had begun.

Nor is this care confined to Jerusalem and the adjacent cities. It extends itself to the utmost parts of his kingdom. Even Bethel, the unhallowed seat of Jeroboam's idolatry, (now once more under the dominion of Judah,) shall partake of his pious solicitude. Some traces of the ancient superstition yet remained—Josiah hastens, with earnest care, to fulfil that ancient prophecy which pointed him out by name as the restorer of true religion four centuries before his birth. "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord—Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name—by him shall men's bones be burnt upon thee!" The hour is come—the word is accomplished. Josiah remembers with joy that God had so long before ordained him to the task of piety, and called him by name to this acceptable service.

The prophet who foretold these events had his tomb in Bethel—that tomb was inscribed with some portion of his history. The Israelites themselves had preserved the monument of their own conviction. Though the bones of the prophet were amongst the sepulchres of idolaters, his epitaph preserves them from desecration. The lion was not suffered to tear him at his death—the multitude are restrained from violating his bones in his grave. Josiah commands them to rest in peace—he will not suffer those ashes to meet with indecent contempt or superstitious reverence.

The false worship is removed—Josiah hastens to celebrate the passover. The book of the law informed him of the time, the place, the circumstances of this ordinance. His zeal so carefully follows it, that, since the days of Samuel, the feast had never been so punctually

celebrated. Jerusalem is the place—the fourteenth day of the first month the time—the Levites are appointed to minister—a spotless lamb is selected—no bone of it is broken—the blood is sprinkled on the door-posts—the passover is eaten with bread unleavened—the remainder is consumed with fire. Every true Israelite participates with joy in the monument of past deliverance—the pledge of future salvation—the type of the expected Messiah.

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#### 48.—THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

What cause, O God, led thee to reject thine own inheritance? What sin of thy people demanded this awful display of thy justice? What but the same crime by which a host of angels lost their celestial thrones? Pride, rebellion, apostacy, sins which set thy mercy at defiance and provoked the severity of thine almighty vengeance! Like the backsliding Israel, the treacherous Judah went astray in the paths of delusion. "The people forsook the commandments of their God and made them molten images—they worshipped all the host of heaven—they served Baal—they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire—they used divination and enchantments—they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, they provoked him to anger with horrible abominations."

Nor were these the fruits of ignorance. They were *wilful* crimes—*obstinate* impieties—continued, notwithstanding the efforts of more than one religious king—increased, notwithstanding the reproofs, the menaces, the doctrines, the miraculous works of those holy prophets which God in his mercy had sent amongst them.

Thy calamity is of thyself, O Judah! What could the just hand of Omnipotence do less, than destroy a nation so incorrigibly flagitious?—a nation so unthankful for mercies, so prone to disobedience, so devoid of lasting repentance?—a nation so favored, so warned, and yet so shamelessly, so daringly wicked?

What people under heaven can deem themselves secure from danger of punishment, when Jerusalem itself is made a desolation? What church could record such instances of the peculiar favor of God as this, his divorced, his faithless spouse? It is not for us sinners of the Gentiles to be high-minded: let us rather fear. If God spared not the natural branches, we also must take heed lest we, through our unfruitfulness, be cut off.

First and chief among the authors of those horrid impieties which drew down the vengeance of heaven, was the cruel and execrable Manasseh. Not content with his personal guilt, he seduced the people of God to his abominations—he spared not his innocent child from the idolatrous fires—he shed the blood of the prophets, till he had filled Jerusalem with slaughter and massacre.

The mighty God, whose name only is Jehovah, was not thus to be insulted with impunity. Regardless of all consequences to themselves, his intrepid servants thundered in the ears of this monster of impiety, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever hears of it both his ears shall tingle." The sin of Manasseh had spread itself by its contagion among his people—the punishment shall be as general as the offence. No ear shall hear of it which shall not glow with astonishment and commiseration. What then is that vengeance, O God, which thou threatenest with such a preface of horror? "I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance. I will deliver them into the hand of

their enemies ; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all that hate them."

Alas, what ear will not tingle, what eye will not weep, what heart will not be confounded at the mention of so dreadful a sentence? Can there be a more grievous judgment than desolation, captivity, desertion, the scorn of prevailing enemies? O God, shall this befall thy Jerusalem, the place which thou hast chosen to thyself, the glory of the earth, the darling of heaven, the lot of thine inheritance, the place of which thou saidst, "Here shall be my rest for ever?" Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore shall she be removed. There is no place whatever from which the Almighty will not withdraw his protection if the transgressions of its inhabitants demand the fatal separation. "I would have healed Sion, but she would not be healed: therefore have I forsaken mine house—I have left mine heritage—I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies." The remembrance of former happiness shall cause increase of sorrow—the height of past prosperity, aggravation of ruin.

While the sword of Divine indignation is thus preparing to quit its scabbard, the transcendent merit of Josiah turns the curse into a blessing, and the destroying angel himself forbears to strike.

But, alas, that religious, just, and virtuous prince is snatched away in the vigor of his years. The God whom he serves calls him unexpectedly from beholding and partaking the miseries of Judah. O how merciful are the judgments of heaven! how blessed the portion of the children of God who are revived by death, united by dissolution, glorified by mortal weakness and infirmity! The good Josiah is now an associate with saints and angels—instead of a fading and corruptible crown, he now enjoys an eternal. His subjects, like orphans bereaved of a tender parent, give vent to their



unavailing sorrow—they are aware that the light of Judah is extinguished, and that darkness and misery await her. If the souls of the blessed could be capable of affliction, the calamities of his sons, his people, his country would have affected Josiah even in the mansions of peace.

O woful and unworthy succession to the best of kings! one son is a prisoner, another a tributary, both are wicked. The people relapse into their ancient idolatry—nothing now delays the execution of predicted vengeance. Nebuchadnezzar, like a destroying tempest, advances with resistless fury. The wretched Jehoiakim, newly seated in the throne, is seized and put in irons. The conqueror removes him to Babylon—his wife, his mother, his princes, his warriors accompany him, manacled and chained, to their perpetual bondage. His sorrows are multiplied instead of being lessened by such society.

The first wo is past—behold, another wo cometh quickly.

One branch yet remains of Josiah's miserable progeny—Mattaniah, the brother of Jehoiakim. Nebuchadnezzar, changing his name to Zedekiah, sets him up in the tributary throne of Judah. There might he have continued in peaceful subjection—but he who had been always rebellious against God, fails in obedience to the king of Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah forewarns him of the consequences, but in vain—nothing could teach him but sad experience.

Thrice had Jerusalem revolted—thrice had conspiracies been formed against that powerful monarch, who in the midst of conquest had hitherto been forbearing. Now for the last time his mighty armies surround the devoted city. Zedekiah, guilty and self-condemned, attempts to escape by flight—he is pursued—he is overtaken—he hears the tremendous decree of the conqueror. His children are slaughtered; his eyes are put out,

having first witnessed a scene of horror which shall dwell on his mind for ever—he is bound in fetters of brass—he is carried away to Babylon, the victim of sorrow and despair.

Now hath the Lord covered with a cloud the daughter of Zion—he hath cast off her altar, he hath abhorred her tabernacle, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces. Nebuzaradan, commander of the Babylonian armies, comes up against the wretched, the defenceless city, breaks down its forts, burns the temple of the Lord, the house of the king, every pleasant and magnificent edifice; drives the remaining inhabitants into captivity; carries away the last spoils of the sanctuary. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the wonder of all ages, the excellency of greatness and glory, how art thou become heaps of ashes, a spectacle of desolation, a monument of ruin! Though later in time, how hast thou shared with thy sister Samaria in the bitter cup of Almighty vengeance! Long had thy God forewarned thee, "Though Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah sin." Thou hast partaken of her iniquities, thou hast smarted under her doom. Both are in the dust, both are made a fearful example to all ages. O God, who shall escape thy justice if thine own Jerusalem thus perished by reason of wickedness? Alas, those goodly cedars of the temple are devoured with fire—those curious marbles, placed in reverential silence on thy holy hill, are broken down with resounding axes and hammers—the veil is rent—the sacred ark of God is violated and defaced—the altars are beaten down—the sanctuary, whereinto none might enter but thine high-priest once a year, thronged with insulting pagans—the pillars demolished—the pavements dug up—the very ground whereon the temple stood, desecrated and deformed.

How frail, how unstable, are the most magnificent

works of man! Only the temple not made with hands is eternal in the heavens. Thither may He graciously conduct us, who hath called us to his everlasting glory, for the sake of that merciful High Priest who entered once for all into that holy of holies! Amen.

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#### 49.—E Z R A .

While Babylon was a queen, Judah was a vassal; but when the oppressors fell, the people of God began to arise. The Babylonian monarchy is no sooner swallowed up by that of Persia, than the Hebrews feel the comfort of returning liberty. The iron yoke is dashed in pieces which had enslaved the captive Sion. Cyrus is at the same moment a conqueror and a deliverer. He sees and pities the wretchedness of the Jews; he sends them, under the conduct of Zorobabel, to their almost forgotten country. Doubtless he was not ignorant that he had been forenamed in the voice of prophecy—that he had been appointed by Heaven to this important service almost two centuries ere he had a being

The first year of his monarchy is not expired before he publishes his royal edicts throughout the kingdom for the restoration of Judah. He calls on all his subjects for their aid. More especially he enjoins and encourages the children of the captivity to promote the pious work. He dismisses the Jews with tokens of princely liberality. Five thousand and four hundred vessels of gold and silver (the precious spoil taken by Nebuchadnezzar) are once more set apart for the service of the house of God in Jerusalem. How does thy munificence, O royal Cyrus, condemn the ra-

capacity of those who fill their houses with sacrilegious plunder! who usurp, for unhallowed purposes, the treasures which ancient piety had consecrated to God!

And was it then to the monarch of Persia alone that the Jews were indebted for their freedom? Didst not thou, O God, in whose hands are the hearts of kings, stir up the spirit of this virtuous heathen to be the friend, the protector, the father of thy church? Did not thy providence dispose his mind to the accomplishment of thine own purpose, and teach his generous soul to feel for the calamities of the daughter of thy people?

Now do the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin prepare for their auspicious journey; now they take down their harps from the willows which grew near the waters of Babylon, and, *unbidden*, sing the songs of their much-loved Sion. They arrive in safety at Jerusalem—Jerusalem, dear to them even in its state of ruin and desolation! Their first care is a public and solemn sacrifice. The interruption of their devotions hath made the service of God still more interesting, still more delightful. With joy inexpressible they “declare the name of the Lord in Sion, and his worship in Jerusalem.” Their prince and their high priest are eager to set up the altar on its basis. Before the foundations of the temple are laid, a place shall be appointed whence the oblations of their grateful hearts might ascend to heaven.

The feast of tabernacles is kept, while they are constrained to abide in tents, before they had prepared them habitations to dwell in. This office performed, they devote their labors to the house of God. Artificers are selected, Tyrian workmen are again called for, Lebanon again bestows her stately cedars. The materials are ready—and now, while the foundation of the temple is laying, the priests stand in their consecrated vestments, with trumpets and cymbals, singing praises to

the God of Israel, who had turned their captivity as the rivers in the south; the people second their hymns with acclamations of transport, whilst the remembrance of past magnificence brings tears into those aged eyes which had beheld the former house in all its glory. If in that militant church, of which we are members, our delight is still attempered by heaviness, let us not abandon our glorious hope! A day shall come when the servants of God will be received into their heavenly Jerusalem, the high and holy city of peace, and love, and joy. No temple made with hands shall be therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things shall pass away!

How different is this unclouded heaven from the tumultuous scenes of mortality! How soon is the rapture of the Jews turned into grief and disappointment! Their patience was not yet fully tried. The malicious suggestions of their Samaritan rivals must yet prevail against them for a season. Long and melancholy is the period during which the walls of the temple lie waste—the city is defenceless—the children of Judah are a derision to their insulting enemies. Edicts of a very different nature from those of Cyrus are promulgated by his successors. The uplifted arm of authority restrains the people of God. They seem only to have exchanged one captivity for another. In silence and sorrow they cease from their labors, till the prophets Haggai and Zechariah rouse them from this state of torpid dejection, and inspire new courage into their disconsolate hearts.

Darius was now seated on the throne of Persia. His officers come, as before, to expostulate. "Who hath commanded you to build this house?" The Hebrews

wisely and modestly plead the service of the God of heaven—the decree of Cyrus—their just and undoubted rights in consequence of it, which subsequent edicts, if they could suspend, were not able to cancel. (See Dan. 6 : 15.) The impartial governors seek not to exasperate—they send messengers to the king, stating the fact, without any malicious comment—they request that search may be made for the decree of Cyrus—they ask the royal pleasure concerning its validity. Darius seeks, finds, ratifies, enlarges it—charges his officers to promote, not to hinder the work—levies tribute beyond the river for the expenses of the building, for the service of the altar—threatening utter ruin to all who should by any means prove adverse to the cause of Jehovah. “The God of heaven, who hath caused his name to dwell there, shall punish all kings and people who shall put to their hand to alter and destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.”

Who would have expected such an edict from a Persian? No Solomon, no David could have said more.

In the sixth year of the reign of Darius the temple of God is finished: and now the dedication of it is celebrated by a joyful feast—the victims smoke upon the consecrated altars—the priests are appointed in their divisions—the Levites in their courses—the children of the captivity esteem this day a sufficient compensation for all their sorrows.

Alas, how soon does it appear that the most salutary instructions may be corrupted by human folly and perverseness! How soon have abuses crept into Judah, which call loudly for reformation! Artaxerxes hath learned of his father to befriend the people of God. Under his government the wise, the learned, the religious Ezra is sent to Jerusalem with authority to inquire into the wants and redress the grievances of his country-

men—to check the progress of national corruption—to ordain magistrates and judges—to promote obedience to the laws—to punish the contumacy of offenders. Thus called, thus encouraged, the consecrated priest assembles a new colony of the Jews; and (secure in the protection of God) will not ask a band of soldiers to help him against the enemy in the way. He had told the king of Persia, with a courage worthy of the faith which inspired it, “The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him—but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.” The Almighty will not suffer this holy confidence to be disappointed. All the armies of Artaxerxes could not have so strongly guarded the people of God as their invisible, their omnipotent Protector.

After a journey of four months, Ezra and his companions arrive at Jerusalem—his heart cannot but feel a momentary joy when he beholds the temple of Jehovah, but soon is he filled with heaviness at the recital of those enormities which had overspread the people. He comes, to find paganism in Judah—he comes, to behold a mixture of idolatrous rites polluting the service of God—while the priests and rulers, who by precept and example should have checked this daring impiety, have been chief and foremost in the trespass.

Distracted with sorrow, Ezra sits down upon the ground—he rends his garments—he remains astonished till the time of evening sacrifice. Then, rising from his heaviness, he spreads out his hands unto the God of his fathers, professing his shame to lift his face from the earth—confessing the iniquities of his people, which were increased over their heads, and grown up to heaven—acknowledging the just hand that had followed them in all their judgments, and the confusion wherewith a guilty nation were standing before an offended God.

The prayers and tears of Ezra are seconded by zealous and active exertions. When evil hath prevailed, it is the part of wisdom not only to *lament* but to *redress* it. He calls on the Jews to renew their covenant with the Almighty—he binds them by an oath of the utmost solemnity that they will return to better obedience. Tears bespeak their contrition—vows, uttered from the heart, proclaim them eager to bring forth fruits of repentance. “Yet is there hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God! Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee—we will also be with thee. Arise, be of good courage, and do it.” If they have done iniquity, they will do no more—if other lords have had dominion over them, henceforth they will only make mention of the name of Jehovah.

O happy endeavors of the devout and faithful Ezra, which have thus restored Jerusalem to herself and to her heavenly King! God is not unrighteous, that he should forget the blessed work, the labor of love. It shall be had in everlasting remembrance—it shall be proclaimed in that awful day when they who are wise will shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they who *turn many to righteousness*, as the stars for ever and ever.

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#### 50.—NEHEMIAH.

Thirteen years were expired since Ezra went up to Jerusalem. During that period of time the holy man had diligently availed himself of the commission granted him by the king of Persia. He had re-established the



purity of religious worship—he had introduced a general reformation among the people—he had set in order the services of the newly-consecrated temple. But, alas, much remained unfinished which regarded the welfare and prosperity of Jerusalem. The walls lay waste—the city was ruinous—the house of God exposed to every danger which might be feared from the secret treachery or open hostility of their evil neighbors. Ezra sees all this, and laments that he is unable to do all that is necessary. But the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.

Hanani, a faithful servant of God, prompted by his own zeal and probably encouraged by Ezra, departs from Jerusalem to the court of Artaxerxes, to implore assistance for his desponding countrymen. He repairs to his brother Nehemiah, and with all the eloquence of impassioned grief tells him that the people are in affliction and reproach—that the fortresses are broken down—that the gates are in the same ruinous condition to which the fury of Nebuchadnezzar had reduced them.

Nehemiah was at peace in the court of Persia, beloved and distinguished by his sovereign. He was in possession of all that the world holds dear or desirable. Why should his happiness be affected by the danger of Jerusalem? If those remote walls are on heaps, he is in the palace of Susa. If his far-distant countrymen are despised, he is held in honorable estimation by the monarch of the world! But the private felicity of a good man is lost in the public distress. When the head suffers, all the members suffer with it.

Nehemiah had once indulged the hope that the gracious edict of Darius, and the royal benevolence which had been extended by his successor to Jerusalem, would have advanced its strength and glory. Now, when he hears that the holy city is still in confusion, despised of men, and, as it were, forsaken by God, he fasts and

mourns, and implores the mercy of heaven. How many inhabitants of Jerusalem actually *beheld* those ruins with dry eyes, or at best were affected with a fruitless sorrow! Nehemiah hears of them afar off, and weeps; he resolves to devote his life to the service of his country. That grief is useless which centres in itself, and is not joined with active endeavors for redress.

He determines to throw himself at the feet of his generous master and make intercession for Jerusalem, but he will first have recourse to his God. He knew that the hearts of earthly kings are under the guidance of the King of heaven; he was not ignorant of the efficacy of fervent prayer. In all our undertakings, if we seek not the blessing of the Almighty, it is in vain to hope for permanent success.

Thus armed, thus prepared, Nehemiah approaches his royal master. The king beholds him overwhelmed with sorrow—sorrow which he neither attempts nor wishes to conceal. His distress was visible in his features, and could not fail of exciting the curiosity and compassion of his lord. He expected this; and his hope is not frustrated. "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." And is a heathen master so gracious? is he so tender toward his servant's grief? O thou Father of mercies and God of all comfort, with what confidence should the troubled spirit, the soul in anguish, betake itself to thee? With what compassion doth thine eye behold our miseries! how is thine ear attentive to all our complaints!

Nehemiah dares not open his mouth to the king till his heart has addressed a sudden ejaculation to God. No business can be so urgent that it may not thus be consecrated to heaven. The prayer of faith ascends (even from the inmost soul) with rapid wings to the throne of mercy. It can solicit God, and bring down an

answer of peace, before a word is uttered by our lips. How can we expect a blessing, which we are either too proud or too careless to ask?

“Let the king live for ever! Why should not my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire?” With an humble preface doth Nehemiah interest the feelings of the king before he utters his request. The generous Artaxerxes listens with benignity to his servant, and cannot but commend the zeal he testifies for his country. He encourages him to speak; his petition is granted ere it can be uttered. Nehemiah first asks permission for his journey, and next, the royal assistance in the prosecution of his laudable designs. Both are readily granted; and he departs with joy and hope.

The proud and insolent adversaries of Judah are cut to the heart at the arrival of a man thus qualified, thus empowered to seek and to promote the welfare of Jerusalem. There can be no greater torture to wicked minds, than to behold the prosperity of God’s people. They need no other tormentor than that which at such a moment lurks in their own bosoms.

Nehemiah soon perceives that the service in which he is engaged is full of difficulty and danger. He sees that all his prudence and all his courage must be called forth to avert the threatened evils. He rises in the night and secretly views the decayed walls of Jerusalem—the ruined gates—the ravages of the triumphant heathen. Yet even now does he anticipate in his mind that complete restitution of the city of God which her friends dared not hope, which not even her jealous and vigilant enemies suspected, or feared. Having fully digested this great work in his own mind, he assembles the rulers of the congregation—he condoles with them on account of the common distress

and reproach; but tells them of the hand of his God which was good upon him. The people behold him with ecstasies of joy, as one sent from heaven for their support and comfort. With hopes to which their souls had long been strangers, they cry out in transports of zeal, "Let us rise up and build." No man is idle—no part is intermitted—every Israelite knows his station. All Jerusalem is at once encompassed with busy laborers. What greater success can be expected than from the joint endeavors of faithful hearts united under the protection of God?

At the *commencement* of the work the adversaries of Judah are full of scorn—its rapid *progress* converts their derision into rage. The Moabites, Ammonites, Arabians conspire against the holy city, and, ere the battlements are set up, seek to demolish those envied ramparts. Wherein hath Sion offended? Was it criminal to seek the means of security? Was there any danger that the Jews would rebel against Artaxerxes, or carry on offensive war against the neighboring states? Had it been so, there might appear some pretence for this hostile disposition—but, alas, how could the feeble remnant of an afflicted and persecuted nation be formidable? Jerusalem only endeavors not to be miserable—and lo, the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. The enemies stand up, the Gentiles take counsel together against the children of God.

Meanwhile, how do Nehemiah and the Jews consult their common safety? They pray to God—they watch against their assailants. The adversaries of our salvation are furious if the contrite heart endeavors to secure itself against their assaults—but we know how to prevail against those spiritual wickednesses which war against our souls. No evil can *surprise* us if we *watch*, no evil can *hurt* us if we *pray*.

The enemy was subtle and malicious: "They shall

neither know nor see till we come in the midst of them and slay them." Open force is not so dangerous as secret dissimulation. They would seem Jews while they were Moabites and Ammonites, and would come under the disguise of brethren for purposes of murder.

Nehemiah, aware of the impending danger, calls together the faithful people of God—bids them remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for their brethren, their sons and their daughters, their wives and their houses. Motives like these cannot fail of inspiring courage—cannot but animate the weakest heart. Nothing can excite the militant soul to stand fast in the day of adversity so much as the remembrance of that infinite power and wisdom which can either avert, or mitigate, or sanctify it.

The task is now divided: each zealous Hebrew is a workman and a soldier. What an image is here of that church where every one labors invested with christian armor—where every one so works that he is ready to ward off all assailants—where diligence is not hazardous, nor valor fruitless!

But what can weapons avail if there are no means to *warn* us against an enemy? Without a trumpet we are armed in vain. The work is large, and we are separated one from another—only the sacred trumpet of God calls us to associate for our mutual preservation. Wo be to the watchman, if the sound he gives be uncertain! Wo be to the people, if when they hear the sound they resort not to the signal! United forces may prosper—single opposition is desperate. All hands and hearts must meet together in the cause of truth and of God.

Discovered stratagems are already in a great measure prevented. The adversaries of Jerusalem hear that the city hath warning. They relinquish their execrable purpose—they depart in shame and confusion

Nehemiah, delivered from the impending danger, completes the fortifications of the holy city. No longer is she a reproach to the nations of the earth. All is accomplished which can tend to the peace, the welfare, the dignity, the security of Sion. And now, what reward shall be given to the deliverer of his country? What bright recompense shall crown his assiduous labors? He needs, he seeks, he will accept no other than is afforded by the conscious feelings of his heart. He calls upon his God to think on him for good—to keep in memory what he hath done for his brethren.

Blessed are they that always keep judgment and do righteousness! They shall be thine, O Lord, in that day when thou makest up thy jewels. Thou shalt remember them with thy peculiar favor—thou shalt visit them with thy salvation. They shall see the felicity of thy chosen—they shall rejoice in the gladness of thy people—they shall give thanks with thine inheritance.



## 51.—ESTHER.

What bounds can be assigned to human ambition? Ahasuerus, king of Persia, whose empire was extended to the most distant regions of the globe, prepares to add yet other provinces to his conquests. He cannot hope to see the land he now possesses, and yet he cannot rest while he hears of more. How small a portion of earth is sufficient for the mighty dead, whom, while living, a whole world could scarcely satisfy? How vain and frivolous is that happiness which depends on popular applause—on the exaggeration of those titles which are very far from conducing to real glory? Nothing can

properly fill the heart of man but He who made it.

Ahasuerus, by way of triumph for his past victories, and with a view of animating his princes and soldiers to future exploits, makes a feast, like himself, princely and magnificent. For six whole months the people, the nations and the languages resort to Susa. The spacious court of the palace is turned into a royal hall—the walls are of rich hangings—the pillars of marble—the couches enriched with silver—the pavement of porphyry—the vessels of the purest gold.

Amidst all this princely magnificence, in the height of his ostentation and glory, the lord of Asia finds himself despised and set at nought by a capricious woman. The scorn and disobedience of his queen, so publicly demonstrated to the world, at once eclipses all his magnificence, fills that heart with sorrow which had expected nothing but joy, and puts the king of so many kings to shame before those very nobles whom he meant to send away astonished at his power and majesty.

The Jews were only partially returned to the land of their captivity; many of that wretched people were yet in the *dominions* of Ahasuerus—all were under the *sceptre* of his power. Lo, the mercy of God causes light to arise in the midst of darkness, to cheer the hearts of a repentant and afflicted nation. The pious and faithful Esther is called on to share the throne of Ahasuerus, in place of the repudiated Vashti. It was happy for this orphan that, in the land of her captivity, the tenderness of Mordecai had fulfilled all those duties which the early death of her parents forbade them to discharge. Above all things, he impressed upon her young mind those *religious* sentiments which preserved her constancy unshaken amidst the severest trials—taught her, in an idolatrous city, to worship the God of Israel—taught her, while in the splendid palace of Susa, to think with the fondest affection on Jerusalem.

She prays, she meditates *in secret*—for Mordecai, on her advancement to the royal dignity, enjoined her to conceal for a season the circumstances of her birth. Her unparalleled beauty had raised her to the throne—he feared lest (while her honors were yet unsettled) the mention of her captivity might expose her to unmerited contempt; he looked forward to the time when her virtues should endear her to every heart; when her name should dignify her nation, and take away the reproach from the people of God.

The office of Mordecai led him to daily attendance at the palace of Ahasuerus—his piety and religion taught him faithfulness in his service. Two of the king's chamberlains conspire against the life of their lord. Mordecai discovers the meditated treason, and reveals it at once to Esther. With what joy does the queen avail herself of this opportunity to commend in public the fidelity of one whom she secretly loved and honored! She imparts the discovery to the king in the name of Mordecai; the circumstances are examined; the plot is discovered; the traitors executed; the service recorded in the Persian annals. No greatness can afford a security from malice or violence. He who ruled over millions of men, the lord of an hundred and twenty-seven provinces, extending from India to Ethiopia, is in danger of his life by the arm of an assassin. How much more happy is the meanest christian! He can look forward to a crown incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for him in the regions of glory. No force, no treason can reach thither; *there* can be no peril either of violence or forfeiture.

Without any other recompense than is afforded by his own conscious virtue, Mordecai returns to the duties of his office. Little did the people imagine that the child of his adoption was seated in the throne of Persia; little did the proud Haman imagine that the man who



refused to pay obeisance to his new-born dignity stood so nearly connected with the empress of the world!

All the servants, all the subjects of Ahasuerus, fall prostrate, by the king's command, before his minion. Mordecai cannot, dares not pay this forbidden homage. His companions charge him with disobedience, and spare not the language of expostulation: he is silent for a while; at last he imparts thus much, in justification of his conduct; "Let it suffice that I am a Jew, and Haman an Amalekite."

How prone are men to hate those who are deaf to their persuasions! The associates of Mordecai hasten to inform the favorite that a proud and stubborn Jew sat among them, who scorned to bow the knee to his greatness. No sooner is the accusation made than the Agagite in a transport of fury repairs to the king's gate, that he might view the man who dared deny reverence to the greatest prince of Persia. How did his eyes sparkle with fury when he saw that no apprehension of personal danger could prevail on Mordecai to transgress the law of his God!

A Jew had offended Haman; the whole nation must perish to assuage his wrath. The monarchy of the world was now in the hands of Ahasuerus; scarcely was there a Hebrew upon earth out of the reach of Haman's fury and his master's power. The generation shall die at once; the people who had been renowned for so many thousand years shall fall a sacrifice, in a moment, to the indignant pride of Haman. Perhaps the hereditary quarrel between Israel and Amalek inflamed his rage and gave fresh vigor to his resentment.

Having previously determined on the day for the intended massacre,\* he repairs to Ahasuerus in a careless

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\* It seems to have been a providential interference of God, that the day fixed on by lot for the perpetration of this atrocious act

confidence of success. He demands, as if it were a trivial request, that a certain people scattered among the king's provinces, a people differing in laws and customs from the rest of mankind, a people useless and burdensome, if not actually dangerous, may be exterminated from the face of the earth. How easy is it to suggest untruths when there is no man to answer! That the Jews were *dispersed* was their misery, not their choice; it was a circumstance which should have disarmed resentment and pleaded for pity; often did they cry unto God in sorrow of heart, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, and save us; our soul is full of contempt; we are scattered among the heathen!" That they were *seditions*, was a most unjust and cruel slander. Their laws enjoined obedience, and denounced vengeance against rebellion. That their extinction would tend to the glory and welfare of Ahasuerus is a charge which Haman himself disproves, while in contradiction to his own assertions he offers ten thousand talents of silver to the royal treasury as the price of innocent blood!

Too long had the king been enslaved to his unworthy favorite. Without considering the weight of these specious arguments, he delivers to the sanguinary monster his royal signet. The secretaries are called—messengers are despatched into all the provinces—the day is appointed on which all Jews, without regard to age or sex, through the whole extent of the Persian empire, shall be sacrificed to the wrath of Haman.

Who shall express the tears, the lamentations, the outcries of this miserable and devoted people when the fatal decree was promulgated? Above all, who shall attempt to paint the grief of Mordecai? "Alas, am not

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should have been at so considerable a distance of time from the projecting of it. In the period of eleven months the treachery of Haman was discovered, and the Jews were spared.

I the sole cause of this general calamity? Could I have imagined that the revenge of Haman would have been thus dreadfully extensive! Had it terminated in *my* blood, I had died contented—now, to have brought death on so many thousands of innocents, what sorrow equals mine? Why did I contest with so powerful an enemy? Why did I not hide myself from the face of that proud Amalekite? Alas, no man of Israel will live to curse me—mine enemies only shall record my name with ignominy, and say, *Mordecai was the bane of his people!* O Lord, if my presumption hath incurred thy displeasure, in what have thy captive tribes offended? O let it be thy just mercy that I should perish alone!”

Such thoughts as these were doubtless in the breast of Mordecai while he walked in sackcloth before than palace whereinto no man was suffered to enter in the habit of a mourner. How different are the ways of God from those of man. That which caused *exclusion* from the court of Ahasuerus, *opens wide* the portals of heaven. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit—a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

The public sorrow of Mordecai cannot long be concealed from Esther. Her diadem, her royal purple afford her no joy while the friend she loves and honors is sitting in sackcloth and ashes. With what consternation does she learn the *cause* of his grief! How does her heart faint within her when she receives the charge of her kinsman to exert all her power, all her interest with the monarch of Persia in behalf of her afflicted people. Alas, whoever dares enter into the royal presence uncalled must die—nothing but the extended sceptre can rescue the offender from the grave. Esther could only bewail, she could not hope to avert the impending evil

Mordecai will not be thus discouraged—though he mourns, he will not utterly despair. Again he addresses the queen in more animated language. “What, is it death

thou fearest? Hast thou any thing but death to expect if thou avoidest the present danger? Art thou not of the race of Israel? If these unalterable edicts exempt no individual of our nation, how shalt thou escape? Wilt thou prefer certain peril to the possibility of hope? Away with this weak timidity, unworthy a believer, unworthy a queen. But if fear or policy withhold thine aid from thy people, if thou neglect the church of God, God will not neglect it. It shall not be in the power of tyrants to exterminate the chosen seed—the Holy One of Israel shall rather work miracles from heaven, than that his inheritance shall perish on earth, or that his own prophecy shall fail. Let me then adjure thee by that tender love which trained up thine orphan infancy—by those grateful sentiments thou hast expressed in return—by the name of the God whom we adore—that thou awaken thine holy courage, and adventure thy life for thy people. Hath it not pleased the Almighty to exalt thee to that pre-eminence of honor for this very purpose, that light may arise by thee to them that sit in darkness, that the remnant of his chosen servants may be saved by thee from utter destruction?”

Mordecai has said enough—his words have inspired Esther with becoming intrepidity. “Go, gather the Jews that are present in Susa, and fast ye for me—I will fast likewise—and so will I go unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.” Heroic thoughts befit great actions. The pious queen trusts to her devotions rather than her beauty. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

## 52.—THE DEATH OF HAMAN.

The time devoted to prayer and abstinence is expired—Esther, arrayed in royal apparel, meekly submitting herself to the will of Heaven, advances to the throne of Ahasuerus. In her look, in her demeanor, courage seems blended with diffidence. As if she said, "It is necessity, not disobedience, that leads me to this bold approach—according to thy will, O king, I live or die—I am prepared for either alternative."

The unexpected presence of Esther, her beauty, her magnanimity at once delight her lord and excite pity in his breast. Love hastens to banish fear. The king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Without this act of clemency her life had been forfeited. The Persian monarchs affected to conceal themselves in stern retirement from the eyes of their subjects. It was death to solicit them uncalled. Blessed are they who dwell in the courts of that King of kings who is always more ready to hear than we to pray, who is never inaccessible—never wearied by our requests. His compassions fail not—in his presence is *life*—his mercies are renewed every morning!

The royal suppliant is not only received with pardon, but cheered with words of more than common benignity. "What wilt thou, queen Esther, and what is thy request? It shall be given thee, even to the half of the kingdom." How is the mercy of God magnified in times of extraordinary difficulty and danger! She who had trembled at the austerity of Ahasuerus, is now amazed at his munificence. Surely the king's heart is in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water—He turneth it whithersoever he will.

The wise queen thinks it not good to make her request too suddenly. Well aware of the importance of her

suit, she desires to prepare the mind of Ahasuerus for its reception. The king and Haman are called to the banquet. Again is Esther solicited to unfold the object of her wishes—again she hesitates, as fearing to speak—another banquet, on the ensuing day, shall give utterance to the purposes of her heart—the haughty favorite is once more invited to the royal pavilion.

But still Mordecai is an alloy to his happiness—no edict of death can bow his knee—before, he looked at Haman as an Amalekite, now, as a persecutor.

No doubt he had received early intelligence from Esther of her gracious welcome—of the extent of the king's promise. He has thrown off his sackcloth—his courage is raised to a more scornful neglect of his insolent adversary. Honest indignation sparkles in his eyes and bids the proud Haman defiance.

Full of rage and fury, the minion returns to his palace. He assembles his family and friends—descants on his magnificence, the height of his favor, the excellency of his glory—“Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.” The darlings of the world are strangers to perfect happiness—some latent sorrow shall still disturb their best enjoyments, and make even their prosperity miserable.

The wife of Haman stimulates him to instant revenge—her impatience will not wait for the distant month Adar. All the council applaud her murderous design—“Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou to the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon—then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.” But God had other designs for his afflicted church, and, in the very instant of intended mischief, he accomplishes his purpose of mercy. He, “who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth,” causeth sleep that night to depart from Ahasuerus. Either to beguile the time, or to employ it well, the king commands the written

chronicles of Persia to be brought before him. The unerring hand of Providence directs him to the record of Mordecai's past zeal—of that vigilant fidelity which preserved the monarch of the world from nightly assassination.

Alarmed at the very recollection of such imminent danger, the king feels new gratitude arise in his bosom. With the anxiety of a generous mind, he demands what honor has been shown to Mordecai in return for his service ; and he learns with sorrow, that the merit to which he was indebted for life, has been too long neglected and forgotten.

The implacable Haman was already in the outer court of the palace to demand the head of Mordecai. He is commanded to approach ; and ere he can utter the purpose of his wicked heart, his master prevents him—“ What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor ?”

Could Haman have thought that the question concerned any mortal but himself, he had not so lavishly consulted a display of such magnificence. He had already the *power* of Ahasuerus—he covets a temporary investiture of his royal dignity. The crown shall be on his head—the mantle of the king upon his shoulders—no meaner person shall attend him in his supposed greatness, than one of the noblest princes—the streets of Susa shall witness the pomp and echo with the splendid proclamation, “ Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor !”

Never is the heart of man so cold within him as when from the height of expected good it falls at once into evil. What were the sensations of thy breast, O Haman, when thou heardest the killing word, “ Do thou this to Mordecai !” Hast thou but one proud enemy in the world, and art thou singled out to grace him ? Did it embitter all thy happiness, that this Jew would not do

obeisance to thee, and must thou bow to him? Must thou be his herald to proclaim his honor through Susa? Why dost thou not signify to thy master the purport of thy coming? Why dost thou not speak of thy murderous preparations?

The mortified Haman retires in distraction of heart, and prepares for the hated service. When Mordecai sees his enemy approach, he imagines himself already summoned to execution—when he sees the purple robe, he says in his heart, “Is it not enough that he kill me, but he must insult my last distress?” But when he sees the royal crown ready to be set on his head, and marks the submissive gestures of Haman, and finds that no mockery is intended, he concludes that this proceeds from Esther’s intercession—he lifts up his heart with joy—he forms the most auspicious hope for himself and for his people.

With a covered head and dejected countenance the Amalekite hastens home to impart his sorrows. He assembles his wife and friends—miserable comforters are they all! “If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but thou shalt surely fall before him.” Out of the mouth of Pagans, O God, hast thou ordained truth, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. O Lord, thou art the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. If we be thy spiritual Israel, neither earth nor hell shall prevail against us—we shall surely stand, or surely rise, while thine enemies shall lick the dust.

The vengeance which has hitherto slept is now awake, and prepares itself for just execution. While the presage of evil is scarcely uttered, its completion is begun. The messengers of Ahasuerus call Haman in haste to the fatal banquet.

The king is now impatient for the long-delayed suit of Esther. Thrice had he pledged himself to grant her



request, though it should extend to half his kingdom. The same wisdom which deferred the prayer, now brings it suddenly forward. To every thing there is a season—a time to keep silence and a time to speak. "If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request." Ahasuerus expected some high and difficult boon; now that he hears his queen beg for *life*, he is transported with fury against her yet unknown adversary: he interrupts her speech with vehement indignation, and as if he had heard too much already, furiously exclaims, "Who is he? Where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?"

How differently do we behold the same actions under different impressions of mind! When Ahasuerus had signed the decree for the massacre of the Jews, he sat down carelessly to the feast with his favorite—now, when he hears the partner of his throne is involved in their danger, he can scarce contain the transports of his heart, while the royal suppliant, fixing her eyes on her hated persecutor, cries out with undaunted courage, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

Ahasuerus rises from the unfinished banquet, hurried away by the tempest of his passions. The criminal sees his fate denounced against him in the angry looks of his master. His tongue falters, his lips tremble, his guilty heart fails him. With a meanness proportioned to his former wickedness, he prostrates himself before the queen in agonies of despair. Even this act of submission is misinterpreted by the enraged Ahasuerus on his return to the pavilion. "The wrath of the king is a message of death." The face of Haman is covered for his approaching execution. No more shall he behold the sun. They who had before done homage to the successful favorite, congratulate each other, and insult him on his downfall. Ahasuerus is made acquainted

with his intended malice against the faithful Mordecai. Haman is doomed, by a just decree, to that ignominious engine of death which he had prepared for the object of his hatred. The Jews have light, and gladness, and joy, and honor. The sentence against them cannot be reversed—its danger is seasonably prevented. Mordecai succeeds to the dignity so justly forfeited by the impious Haman. He who sat in the gate is made next unto the throne. The feast of Purim is ordained for a perpetual memory of the deliverance of the people of God.

“Behold! the wicked travaileth with mischief: he hath conceived sorrow and brought forth ungodliness—he made a pit and digged it, and is fallen himself into the destruction that he made for others. Wherefore then should he blaspheme God, while he doth say in his heart, “*Thou wilt not require it?*” “Surely thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest ungodliness and wrong—that thou mayest take the matter into thine hand—the poor committeth himself to thee; for thou art the helper of the friendless.”

# THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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## 53.—THE ANGEL AND ZACHARIAS.

The time of the promise draweth nigh—the Sun of Righteousness is about to arise with healing in his wings. Already do we see the dawn which proclaims the approach of day. “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith our God.”

“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” The demand, O Savior, had a view to thy *second* advent—it was but too applicable to thy *first*. The Jewish church was in a state of extreme corruption when the harbinger of the glorious Gospel was sent into the world. Yet, bad as it was, not only the priesthood but the courses of attendance continued even from David’s time till Christ. A settled good is not easily defeated. Often does it remain unchanged even in the change of persons, and when at length it is compelled to give way, it fails not to leave memorable traces behind it. If David foresaw that these holy ordinances would continue till the coming of the Messiah, how did he rejoice, how did he bless the God who loved Sion and declared it to be his rest for ever!

The *services* of the legal ministration were uninterrupted. But, alas, how little remained of that spiritual life, without which the law and all its institutions were fruitless and imperfect! That filial obedience which flowed from the heart, was for the most part vanished. The temple yet was standing when the ministers of

the temple delighted in sacrilege and impiety. The ordinance yet remained, while hypocrisy and every species of guilt were arrayed in the vestments of sanctity.

Yet never were times so desperate as not to yield some remnant of good. Some fruitful ears of corn are to be found even in the midst of famine. Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous before God in a degenerate age—in days of grievous depravity they walked in all the ordinances of God blameless. Distinguished by piety and exemplary virtue, while their souls were united in duty to heaven, as their hearts in affection to each other, they descended together into the vale of years.

The God whom they so devoutly served thought proper to exercise the faith and patience of these his saints. "They had no child, because Elizabeth was barren." During the greatest part of her life the holy matron was childless: a circumstance always lamented under the Jewish dispensation, but now more particularly deplored when the people were awakened to the expectation of their promised Deliverer. Of parents thus advanced in age the herald of Christ was to be born—that the miraculous manner of his birth might excite the attention of mankind, and dispose them to listen to his voice when it should be heard in the wilderness; while it prepared them for that still greater event foretold by the prophet, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bring forth a son!"

The promise to Zacharias was made at the time of incense, when having put on the robe of honor, and being clothed with beautiful garments, he entered the temple. The people assembled without, sent up their united prayers to the throne of grace, through the intercession of him who represented "One that should arise after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron." While the joint prayers of priest and

people were thus offered up with the blood of sprinkling, and the sweet odors of holy incense, an angel suddenly appeared to Zacharias as he was ministering in the house of God, where these blessed spirits delight to resort, as a resemblance of those happy mansions whence they descend.

Twice in every day the law commanded the priests to offer incense to Jehovah. The prayers of the christian should ascend in like manner, with every rising and setting sun, to that gracious Being who maketh the outgoings of the morning and of the evening to praise him. The elevation of our hearts should be *perpetual*; but if, at least twice in the day, we present not our solemn addresses to our God, we declare (as far as actions can speak) that the Gospel of Christ requires less scrupulous observance than the law of Moses.

While the people are praying, the priest offers incense: the angel of the Lord comes down, to signify the divine acceptance of both these oblations. Long had God withdrawn from Judah these visions and revelations from above—now, on the approach of the Savior, he visits mankind with his angels before he speaks to them by his Son. Always do these blessed spirits encamp round about us—they are equally present when they are invisible. But it was the will of God to distinguish, by miraculous exertions of his power, the birth of him who should proclaim the Redeemer. He would give strength and dignity to that voice which should precede the coming of his ever-blessed Son; he would demonstrate to the world, that the fore-runner of the Messiah should himself be conceived through the miraculous power of that God whose advent he announced to mankind.

Zacharias, who had so long lived and served in the presence of God, was overwhelmed with fear at the sight of his angel. In vain may we seek for perfection,

even in the best of men. The weakness of human nature is overpowered by celestial glory—and man, conscious of having offended against his Creator, naturally trembles at a messenger from heaven. But while the holy priest was alarmed at the approach of his fellow-servant, the good angel is anxious to remove his terror with words of comfort and encouragement—"Fear not, Zacharias; thy prayer is heard."

Often had the holy man prayed for the redemption of Israel; his faith and piety are now rewarded by his being made, in so wonderful a manner, the father of one who should "go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." The *priest* was anxious for the welfare of the church; and the *man* was blessed in his family. He sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and he heard of joy and gladness when the gift he had so long solicited for himself was added thereunto. The promise of a son, and such a son; that his birth should be the subject of general joy; that he should be great in the sight of the Lord; consecrated to heaven; filled with the Spirit; beneficial to his countrymen; the immediate herald of the Prince of Peace; intelligence of so stupendous a nature could not fail to overpower the heart with ecstasy of joy, and to take away that tongue with *amazement*, which was afterwards lost by *incredulity*.

The extent and greatness of the promised blessing seem for a while to have suspended belief. Zacharias dwells on the difficulty, the utter improbability of the event foretold—the supernatural tidings astonish his heart, and he distrusts the power and the truth of God. "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years." If the natural man too presumptuously encroach on spiritual things, he is in danger of being taken captive by infidelity. We must be assured that God is able to do that which we cannot

comprehend—we must behold with the eye of faith that light which cannot be viewed by mortal perception. How different from the conduct of Zacharias was that of his father Abraham, “who, against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken! He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in the faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.” Zacharias demands a sign—a sign is granted in punishment of his unbelief. The powers of that tongue, which, instead of uttering praises, expressed only doubts, are taken from him—and a long silence is imposed as a penalty for his abuse of speech.

Zacharias tarried in the temple till the impatience of the people was converted into amazement—at last he comes forth, pale, speechless, astonishing them more by his presence than his delay. The multitude would not depart till he returned to bless them; now he beckons to them, and remains silent. He gives them to understand by signs that God was preparing salvation for his church. His hand speaks what his lips cannot utter. But when the wonderful child was actually born, who had been thus miraculously promised, then the mouth of the father was opened, and (to show us the proper employment of the tongue when heaven grants the use of it) he spake and praised God. Faith restored what incredulity had taken away. And his heart having been prepared by silence and retirement for the reception of celestial influences, he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and ascribed blessing to the Lord God of Israel, “who had visited and redeemed his people.”

## 54.—THE ANNUNCIATION OF CHRIST.

How is the morning-star, which precedes the perfect day, eclipsed by the brightness of His rising who should be an everlasting light to his people! How is the sense of all other mercies overwhelmed by that grateful transport wherewith we contemplate the incarnation of the Son of God!

Never was the Holy Spirit so minutely accurate in any description as in that which concerns the appearance of the Messiah upon earth. It was fit that no circumstance should be omitted in the narrative of that event whereon depend the faith and salvation of the world. The number of the month, the name of the angel, the place, the person to whom he was sent with joyful tidings, the very words of that message he was commissioned to reveal, all are faithfully recorded. From her state of darkness and sorrow the church is called on to behold her Redeemer coming to impart new life to mankind, and to enlighten the world with his glory. The messenger of this salvation was an archangel. Heaven rejoiced and the earth was glad when God spake comfort to his people. No greater honor could be conferred on an immortal spirit than was consequent on an embassy like this.

"Hail, thou that art highly favored! the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." An evil angel was the author of our fall—a good angel is the herald of our deliverance. No power but that of God could *accomplish* this work of mercy; but the inhabitants of heaven triumph in its completion, and increase their own felicity by bringing news of ours. Joyfully did this blessed spirit announce to the virgin the approach of redemption. The first preacher of the Gospel was an angel. How glorious the office of proclaiming salvation from sin and death!



Whither is the celestial messenger sent by God but to the obscure and despised Galilee! a region which the Jews themselves held in such contempt as to deem it excluded from the benefits and from the privileges of their nation—"Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Thou seest not, O Lord, as man seeth; neither pride nor prejudice can stop the progress of thy mercy—where thou wilt bless, they cannot reverse it. To that country whence no prophet is said to come forth, an angel is commissioned to descend. In a land thus neglected, thus stigmatized, the Lord of prophets and of angels is conceived, and takes up his abode. It is the person who gives honor to the place, not the place to the person—the presence of God constitutes heaven—the incarnation of Christ causes Nazareth itself to exceed the haughty Jerusalem in glory.

Who shall presume to dictate to the Almighty in what manner he should bestow those distinctions which alone are of intrinsic value? He seeks out the poor, the meek, the despised, as objects of his peculiar favor—the cottages of Galilee are more precious in his sight than the palaces of Sion. Why then should we be enslaved by vanity and ambition, when we see their dearest gifts so lightly esteemed in the presence of God?

The angel approaches the humble virgin with *salutation*, not with *prayer*. The appearance of the angel, accompanied with celestial splendor and radiance, impressed her mind with awe, notwithstanding the benignity of his address. If Zacharias himself was filled with consternation at such a vision, we cannot imagine that Mary could be altogether free from astonishment and fear. But the troubles of holy minds do not fail to terminate in comfort. The design of the message was to impart joy and not terror. Anxiety disquiets the soul and for the time makes it unfit to receive communications from above. Soon are these troublesome mists

of apprehension done away—the beams of heavenly comfort shine on her who is thus highly distinguished. “Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God.” Let those *tremble* who have reason to expect the displeasure of heaven—thy happy state calls for confidence, and that confidence for joy. The High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, will speak peace to thine heart and revive thine humble spirit.

What can we fear if we are favored by his almighty power to whom all things in heaven and in earth, and under the earth, do obeisance? The dangers most alarming to *us* proceed from the temptations of the powers of darkness, not from the unexpected presence of the children of light. Yet even these assaults of our spiritual adversaries would be less formidable if we kept in view the terms of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father!” With such exceeding great and precious promises, with this hope the anchor of the soul, why should we fear in the day of adversity? How can the powers of hell prevail against us while the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God?

It was no ordinary favor that the virgin found in heaven. “Thou shalt conceive, and bear a Son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Sion! put on thy beautiful garments, O city of our God! for the Lord hath mercy on his people, and the days of their mourning shall be ended. The blessing announced to the

highly-favored Mary diffused its gracious influence on all the world. The honor was to her alone—the salvation unbounded and universal. The promise made by the angel to the mother of our Lord, is to us, to our children, to all that are afar off, as well as to those that are nigh. There is no regenerate soul in which thou, O Savior, art not formed again. Christ dwelleth in our hearts by faith; our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. O God, who can partake of thee and not be happy? Blessed art thou, who hast thus made thy servants blessed!

The blessed virgin having heard the mysterious message from above, inquires, but with awful reverence, as to the manner wherein the promise should be accomplished. Her desire of information was altogether different from the doubts of infidelity. Her words are the words of faith mingled with admiration. Not, "Whence, and who art thou? What kingdom is this whereof thou makest promise? When and where shall it be established?" But, taking for granted what the unbelieving heart would at once have rejected, she only insists on that which necessarily required a further intimation, and does not distrust, but demand.

The angel answers in language tending to inform her judgment and support her faith—not such as had in view the solution of doubts or the mere satisfaction of curiosity. He refers the pious virgin to the almighty power of Jehovah. It is enough for us to be assured who is the Author of our salvation; we are aware that the *means* whereby it was accomplished ought not to be too presumptuously investigated. O Lord, we are content to know in part, till the day of perfection shall come, when that which is in part shall be done away. Why should we seek for other elucidation where the subject is involved in awful obscurity? O let us not break through to gaze—let us keep it ever in our

hearts that the place whereon we stand is holy ground. It is for none but the Almighty to know that which more immediately concerns himself. He hath taught his creatures all that is necessary for their salvation. The secret things belong to God—the things which are revealed, to us.

We hear of no more interrogations on the part of the blessed virgin. A devout and humble heart, when it understands the good pleasure of God, argues no more, but rests in quiet expectation—"Behold the handmaid of the Lord—be it unto me according to thy word." There is not a more exalted proof of our love to God than is shown when we submit all the faculties of our souls to him, and follow where he is pleased to lead the way. When we are made acquainted with his holy word, disputes and cavils arise only from infidelity. Great is the mystery of godliness—God was manifest in the flesh. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. O Lord, thou art faithful, thou art powerful—it is enough that thou hast said it. In the humility of our obedience we resign ourselves to thee—"Behold the servants of the Lord—be it unto us according to thy word."



## 55.—THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

Now is the christian church arrayed in her festal garments; now are the high praises of God more especially in the mouths of his people. We contemplate mercies whereby light is given to a world that sat in darkness—we record benefits worthy of being revealed by an angel and celebrated by the assembled choir of heaven.

Cry out and shout, O city of Sion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee. Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder—and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

No sooner had the messenger from heaven delivered his embassy to the mother of our Lord, than she arose in haste and went into the hill-country of Judea. She had been told by the angel of those wonders of divine power and mercy displayed towards the happy Elizabeth; whose unexpected fruitfulness, in her old age, was a token of other and greater miracles of omnipotence. The blessed virgin is anxious to visit her venerable friend—nothing shall delay that meeting, which can only be paralleled by the felicitations of glorified spirits in the kingdom of God. Elizabeth, in ecstasies of joy, proclaims her guest to be blessed among women—applauds her faith—confirms her hope—declares herself unworthy of a privilege so distinguished as to receive under her roof the mother of her Lord. Mary, in humble but fervent gratitude, acknowledges the bounty of heaven; her soul doth magnify the Lord; her spirit rejoiceth in God her Savior. "Break forth into joy, sing together, for the Lord hath comforted his people; he hath redeemed Jerusalem. Let us be glad, and shout for joy; the winter is past; the storms of affliction are over and gone. Discord is vanished away and melted into harmony. He that is mighty hath done great things, and holy is his name."

At length an edict of Augustus summons Mary to the city of David. The providence of God directs the public actions of men to the accomplishment of his sacred purpose. The charge was universal, to innumerable subjects through all the Roman empire. By means of this taxation Christ shall be born in Bethlehem. Cæsar had

no views but for his own advantage—God meant to fulfil his prophecies; and so to fulfil them, that they who were most nearly concerned should read his will in the events themselves, not in the steps which led to them.

What a testimony is borne to the Savior of mankind by the government and by the decree of Augustus! Now the whole world was at rest. All was quiet under the sceptre which made preparation for the Prince of Peace. But this sceptre was departed from Judah—Herod, Cyrenius, Augustus, all were aliens. It was time for Shiloh (Gen. 49 : 10) to come. A tribute is imposed upon the people of God; the very act of bondage is the signal of approaching liberty. At the moment when Sion said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me," she is blessed by the appearance of her Redeemer—when she is most oppressed by foreign sovereignty God sends her a King of her own, before whose throne Cæsar himself shall hereafter appear in humble subjection!

Whither must Joseph and Mary come to be taxed but to Bethlehem? The very place proved their descent. He who should succeed David in his throne must also succeed him in the place of his birth. So clearly was Bethlehem described by the prophets as the scene where this great event should happen, that the very priests and scribes could point it out to Herod as the city wherein the King of the Jews should be born.

Hither the blessed Mary was called on by the edict of Augustus to repair when the time of her delivery was at hand. Joseph, who had been taught by God to love and honor her, was doubtless unwilling to expose her to so manifest a hazard, but the charge was peremptory, the obedience exemplary. That God by whom kings reign teaches us, by example as well as precept, to pay allegiance to lawful authority.

The difficulties of the journey are surmounted—but the daughter of David finds no compassionate shelter, no kind reception in the city of her royal ancestor. Little did the inhabitants of Bethlehem imagine what a guest they refused. How gladly would they otherwise have opened their doors to him, through whose merits and intercession alone the kingdom of heaven will be opened to all believers! Now in their inhospitality they have their punishment. They have lost that honor and happiness which they might have enjoyed, and which would have far exceeded all earthly glories. But why do we reproach their ignorance, and forget our own insensibility? If we suffer worldly thoughts and sensual desires to exclude Christ from our souls, how much greater is our guilt, how much deeper our ingratitude!

O God, in what language shall we express our wonder at this humility? Thou, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, when thou wouldst visit this world of thine, hast not where to lay thine head. Thou, at whose disposal are the many mansions of thy Father's house, art refused admittance into the meanest cottage of Bethlehem. Thou camest to thine own, and thine own received thee not. Hadst thou assumed the form of some mighty potentate—hadst thou taken to thyself an abundant portion of those gifts which mortals hold desirable, even then thy self-abasement would have been worthy of our grateful adoration; but when thou art content to appear in the form of a servant, and when a manger is the scene of thine humble birth, how great, how unutterable is thy condescension! Didst thou not, blessed Lord, didst thou not thus debase thyself to teach us lowliness of mind, to sanctify poverty, to quench the spirit of arrogance in our hearts, casting down imaginations and every high thing which exalteth itself against thee, and bringing into captivity every thought to thine obedience?

The kings of the earth are at rest, and are not summoned to attend on him to whom they owe their greatness; but the Messiah is no sooner born, than the glory of the Lord shines with brightness inexpressible on a company of shepherds keeping watch by night over their flocks near Bethlehem.

It was no new thing for manifestations from heaven to be vouchsafed to persons employed in the pastoral life. Among those who were thus distinguished by the Divine favor, we find the holy patriarch Jacob, Moses the legislator, and David the king of Israel. These, and many others, while attending on their flocks, had visions and revelations from the Almighty—with these he often deigned to hold converse in their solitudes. And now the welcome message of redemption is imparted by the ministration of angels to a band of shepherds employed in their peaceful and innocent occupation. Never have we more reason to expect a blessing from above, than while we are engaged in our respective callings with cheerful diligence, relying on the good providence of God. While a sacred terror took possession of the souls of these Israelites, a multitude of the heavenly host joined in the song of rapture and hailed the propitious arrival of the Son of God.

How doth the Divine wisdom make choice of the weak to confound the mighty! At midnight, in the fields, to obscure and lowly persons, the light of redemption is made manifest by the choir of heaven. No station is so mean as to exclude us from the Divine favor; the Lord of glory is an inmate of the humble soul; he putteth down the mighty from their seat, and exalteth them of low degree.

“Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men.” O ye blessed angels, the church of God unites her praises with yours; a thankful world, at the feet of its Deliverer, pours forth its effusions of joy



and welcomes the hour of liberty. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; and now, instead of drooping and pining away in miserable bondage, it flies on the wings of rapture, and sings its song of praise at the gates of heaven—celebrating a day yet more glorious than that whereon the morning stars first sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

No sooner do the shepherds hear tidings of a Savior, than they repair with haste to Bethlehem—regardless of their flocks, they esteem all things as of no value which can detain them from that blissful sight. It is not possible that a faithful heart should hear of Christ and not desire earnestly to approach and to enjoy him. Where art thou to be found, O Lord, but in thine house, thy word, thy ordinances? There thou seekest for us, there thou callest us to thyself. O let us make speed to find thee, and let us by faith behold the glory that is revealed. In thy light shall we see light—cast us not away from thy presence—take not thine Holy Spirit from us.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, *That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*”



## 56.—THE SAGES AND THE STAR.

The shepherds, full of joy and wonder, behold the Redeemer of mankind in his state of great humility—they depart, and publish in the adjacent country what they had seen and heard. Their narrative occasions a temporary amazement—but soon the sound dies away and sinks into oblivion. No inhabitant of Bethlehem is awakened to the duties of hospitality—still does HE lie

in a manger whom the angels left their thrones to proclaim, whom the sages travelled from the east to worship, whom a bright star notified to the world as claiming the adoration of heaven and earth. The Gentiles, O Savior, came to thy light, they came to the brightness of thy rising. This first event foretold those which should follow: the heathen come from far to adore the Messiah, while the Jews reject him.

Studious in their researches after truth, the wise men were selected by God to do honor to the manifestation of his Son. Human learning, well improved, makes us capable of divine. There is no knowledge, whereof God is not the author—he would never have bestowed on his creatures a gift which had a tendency to estrange them from himself. What can be more groundless than the assertion, that an inquiry into the laws of nature tends to make us atheists? No man is so qualified to see the star of Christ as a diligent proficient in philosophy.

The miraculous light which conducted the sages to Judea was visible to others—they only followed it who knew that it could not be accounted for on natural principles. He is truly wise whose wisdom tends to salvation. Had these men been acquainted with all the luminaries of heaven and remained ignorant of this star, they would have been destitute of spiritual knowledge—the light that was in them would have been darkness. Learning, when separated from christianity, is but a false and treacherous phantom, which seduces mankind to the paths of error and destruction.

How does the mercy of God proportion his grace to the capacity and disposition of its objects! The angels direct the shepherds—the star guides the sages: their skill in astronomy had taught them that the form, the brightness, the motion of this luminous orb was every way miraculous. The superstitious might well conjecture that some strange news was portended to the

world—but that this star announced the birth of the Messiah, was a truth which needed another light—had it not been accompanied by revelation from God, it would have led the wise men only into fruitless wonder.

He who taught Balaam that a star should arise out of Jacob, enlightened the heart of these sages with divine illumination. The Spirit of God knows no partiality, no restriction. Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven. The Almighty confined not his favors to Jerusalem—the sound went forth into all the world—not only Jews, but Gentiles were chosen to be the instruments of his glory.

Whither should the wise men repair but to Jerusalem? Where should they hope to hear of the new King but in the metropolis of the kingdom? The star only conducted them to Judea—the rest is left to their inquiry. Their wisdom could not teach them to imagine that a prince could be born whom heaven itself announced to the world, and that his own subjects could be ignorant of it—not deeming the question difficult to be answered, they demand, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

Had these sages met with the shepherds near Bethlehem, they had received that intelligence of Christ, which they sought in vain at Jerusalem. The glad tidings of salvation were hidden from the wise and prudent, and were revealed unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. Meanwhile no circumstance was wanting which might confirm the truth of the Gospel, or put to silence the arrogance of infidelity. The chief priests and scribes attest the predicted place of our Savior’s nativity. If the star had led the wise men at once to Bethlehem, the learned Jews had never searched the import of those prophecies which led at once to their conviction.

It was well that the name of foreigners could plead in excuse for those who sought a new king at the court of Herod: had any of his own subjects made the demand, the offender would (no doubt) have been punished with death. The tyrant would not have aspired to the crown of Judea, nor pursued such indirect measures to obtain it, if his heart had not been enslaved to ambition. With what terror and consternation did he hear the words of the sages? His long residence among the Jews had made him familiar with those many and confident reports of a Deliverer who should ere long arise out of Israel; now, when he is told that a King is born, whose coming is notified by a star from heaven, he is struck with sudden consternation. Every thing alarms the guilty—usurpation is always full of jealousy and torment.

Why art thou troubled, O Herod? A King is born, but a King whose government concurs with lawful sovereignty—a Prince, by whom righteous kings *hold* their sceptres, not lose them. The wise men speak of a king, the star tells thee he is heavenly—here is cause of security, not of fear. If men could know how much delight is afforded by the presence of the Redeemer, he would be received by them, not with apprehension, but with grateful welcome.

Herod assembles his council, and demands where Christ shall be born. The miraculous light has disappeared—but there is a fixed star, shining in the writings of the prophets, which sends them directly to Bethlehem. As yet envy and prejudice had not blinded the eyes and perverted the hearts of the Jewish teachers—they now clearly justify that Messiah whom they afterwards condemn, and, by thus justifying him, condemn themselves in rejecting him. If God had no more witness than from his enemies, we have ground enough for our faith.

Herod feared, but dissembled his fear. The tyrant's pride would not suffer him to betray his terror to strangers—he contents himself with sending the sages to Bethlehem in search of the new-born King. How easily might the cruelty of Herod have suborned some of his bloody minions to rid him of all apprehension! But the good providence of God would not suffer the machinations of evil men to counteract the designs of his heavenly mercy. The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the anointed of the Lord; but Jehovah will not leave him in their hand.

There is no villany which cannot mask itself under a show of piety. *Herod* will also worship the babe! The courtesy of a tyrant is death—never does a hypocrite imagine so much wickedness as when he speaks the fairest. The wise men depart full of expectation and desire—they depart, but unaccompanied. Whether impeded by distrust, or fear, or infidelity, of all the thousands of Judah no individual attempts to see that King whom strangers came from the east to visit. Yet are not these resolute sages discouraged; they cheerfully pursue their journey to that place which the ancient light of prophecy pointed out. And now, behold, God bears witness to them from heaven, by sending again their first guide to direct their steps towards Bethlehem. What joy these wise men conceived when their eyes beheld the reappearance of that friendly star, *they* only can imagine who, after a long and grievous night of sorrow, have experienced the loving-kindness of God shining upon their souls. If with obedience and constancy we follow his commandments, we shall not want supplies of comfort. If we forsake not our God, he will look down upon us, and bless us, and show us the light of his countenance, and be merciful unto us.

He who led Israel by a pillar of fire to the land of promise, leads the sages by a star to the promised Mes-

siah. All his directions partake of his own Divine nature. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. His goodness condescends to human infirmity—his knowledge vouchsafes to instruct our ignorance.

When the wise men see the star become stationary, they look around for the royal palace which they had so long and anxiously sought—they scarcely trust the evidence of their senses, that under that lowly roof they are to find their expected King. Yet do they not refuse to enter. They approach, and behold thee, O Savior, in thy state of meek humility, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger, unattended but by thy blessed mother and her betrothed husband. What a sight was this, after all the glorious promises of the star, after all the predictions of the prophets, after all the magnificence of their expectation!

Had these holy men been weak in the faith they had sought elsewhere for their King, and sought in vain. But they had not so learned Christ—no sooner do they behold the heavenly infant than they fall down and worship. They behold his royalty, though afar off—a royalty more than human, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Nor are they contented to hold up empty hands to the Redeemer; they accompany their adoration with gifts, the most precious produce of their country. Gold, and frankincense, and myrrh are presented to Jesus, in humble testimony of his supremacy.

The oblations of faith and piety cannot fail of finding acceptance in the sight of our heavenly Father. He regards as a free-will offering to himself the tribute of grateful love. The sacrifice of the righteous is well-pleasing unto God—how much more when he bringeth it with a willing mind?

## 57.—THE PURIFICATION.

He who came to be sin for us, would satisfy the law, that he might take away our uncleanness, that righteousness might be imputed to us also. Though he were exempt from the common condition of our birth, he condescended to a compliance with those accustomed rites which implied the weakness and imperfection of human nature. Not a day is changed, either in the circumcision of Christ or the purification of Mary. However ill-adapted was the scene of our Lord's birth for this appointed ritual, he would not transgress the institutions once delivered by himself. We cannot be thine, O Lord, if our souls are uncircumcised—O grant that we may be partakers of thy holiness—cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy blessed Spirit—that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy glorious name !

When the angel of God appeared to Joseph, to vindicate the character of his espoused wife, and to remove those suspicions which had agitated his mind, he told the adopted father of our Lord by what name he should call the heavenly child. "She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus—for he shall save his people from their sins." Already had instructions to the same effect been given to Mary. When she received the glad tidings of joy and salvation, the celestial messenger declared that the promised Messiah should be known by a name, signifying both his power and mercy—a name expressive of deliverance vouchsafed by God to his faithful people. The illustrious successor of Moses, the great High-Priest who led the children of the captivity to their much-loved Jerusalem, had borne the same appellation. Each was an eminent forerunner of our Lord—each was more than in name a minister of deliverance. The one conducted the chosen people of God from the wilderness

into the land of promise, with victory, and glory, and joy—the other brought them once more from their miserable vassalage, to liberty and peace. While the Author of a greater salvation, calling us out of the desert of this world, out of the miserable bondage of sin, invites us to the mansions of eternal happiness—to that Jerusalem, which being above, is free—to the glorious liberty of the children of God. “Therefore hath his almighty Father highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name—that at the name of *Jesus* every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth—and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

No sooner is the blessed virgin capable of undertaking the journey, than she repairs from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, to perform the holy rites which the law of Moses had appointed for herself and for her Son—to purify herself, to present her first-born. She goes not to her own house at Nazareth, she hastens to the temple of God. If purifying were a *shadow*, thanksgiving is a *substance*. That mother, who (having experienced the mercy of heaven in the hour of pain and danger) refuses to offer her tribute of cheering praise, partakes neither of the gratitude nor the devotion of Mary.

The rumor of a King newly born at Bethlehem was yet recent at Jerusalem, since the journey of the eastern sages. With what joy would the minions of Herod have betrayed him to their master, had not the merciful providence of God shielded him from discovery! With what joy would they have proclaimed, “Here is the babe whom the star announced, whom the wise men sought, whom the angels celebrated, of whom the shepherds discoursed, whom the chief priests and scribes notified, who is already the rival of our sovereign.” Yet to this very Jerusalem, which had been troubled at the news of his



birth, is Christ come—while the tyrant who sent to Bethlehem to seek him is foiled and baffled in his own miserable policy. God saw that it was not time to give scope to the fury of the oppressor. Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee, O Lord—the rage of thine adversaries shall conduce to their shame and thy glory.

On the day appointed by the law the blessed virgin presents herself and her infant in the temple. She urges not her high privilege, but dutifully complies with those ordinances which could in no case be neglected without offence or danger—like the mother of him whom it behoved to fulfil all righteousness—like the mother of him, who, though he knew the children free, would yet himself pay tribute to Cæsar.

The service required by God is regulated by our ability. Every mother among the Jews was not able to afford a lamb for a burnt-offering: a pair of turtle doves, or young pigeons was an oblation easy to be procured by those in the meanest state. These did the Lord of heaven and earth prescribe in his law—accepting them no less graciously than the cattle upon a thousand hills. He seeks some testimony of grateful devotion; but he wishes to proportion it to the station and power of the worshipper. The smallest offering of an humble and thankful heart is precious in his sight—a mite from the poor widow is more dear to him than all the talents of the wealthy.

The blessed virgin comes in the form of poverty before her God—the offering itself spake her penury. How can we despise a fellow-christian for the lowliness of his condition, when we reflect that the mother of our Lord was unable to provide a lamb for her purification? O Mary, thy Son, for whom thou broughtest that dove to be sacrificed, was that sacrifice which the dove represented.

There was nothing in him but perfection of innocence; and by the oblation of him the children of men are puri-

fied, and made holy. Since in ourselves we cannot be innocent, happy are we that the spotless victim is sacrificed for us, to make us innocent in Him !

Not only to offer the sacrifice of purification for herself, but to present the child Jesus to his heavenly Father, did the virgin approach the temple. Every first-born son, by a general consecration, was holy unto the Lord. Since that display of almighty power and mercy which brought death to Egypt and life to Israel, God had claimed this service as due unto himself. The Lord of all creatures had an unlimited title to his own ; and the obedience of Christ would leave nothing unaccomplished which eternal wisdom had enjoined. But when God, by his immediate appointment, chose the tribe of Levi to minister unto himself, the first-born of the other tribes (instead of being immediately devoted to the ministry) were merely presented in the temple, and afterwards restored to their parents. Nor did this law regard only the children of men—the first male of every clean beast was set apart for sacrifice ; of every unclean, exchanged for a price. The Divine institution conveyed a useful lesson, that the best of God's gifts is most fit to be consecrated to the Giver. Every thing we have exceeds our deserts—how much more, if we think any thing too precious for Him ?

God would not leave himself without witness. Within those sacred walls he had prepared an attestation to his blessed Son. There the devout Anna fastened her eyes on the hope of Israel—there the holy Simeon, who had been assured that he should not taste of death till he had seen the Messiah, poured forth the effusions of grateful transport. How lovely is that old age which can reflect on the past without remorse, and look forward to the future with faith and hope ! Go to thy repose, thou faithful servant of thy Master—thine eyes have seen his salvation—let thy hoary head rest in peace, in humble expectation of its crown of glory. Again shalt thou see thy Lord and

Savior—thou shalt see him again—thine heart shall rejoice—never more shall that joy be taken away from thee.

How glorious did the temple now appear! This was the hour, this was the guest, by reason of whom the glory of the second house should exceed that of the first. That Desire of all nations, the Lord, who was sought by faith and hope, was now in the hallowed abode consecrated to himself. There had he long dwelt, in his spiritual and in his typical presence. Nothing was either placed or done within those walls which had not a reference to, or a resemblance of him—and now the substance of these shadows is come, and presents himself in that place where he had ever been prefigured to mankind.

Under the Gospel we are all first-born; all heirs—every soul is consecrated to the Lord—we are a royal generation, a holy priesthood. Nothing can become us but holiness. O thou, to whom we are devoted, by whose holy name we are called, accept our services—pardon our imperfections—glorify thyself by us—and, through thy merits and mediation, let us be glorified with thee for evermore. Amen.



## 58.—HEROD AND THE INFANTS.

The secrecy of Herod was of itself just cause of suspicion to the eastern sages. If his designs were laudable, what needed his dark and private consultations? Why did he intrust an affair of such magnitude to strangers, without associating himself or his people with them in their search after the new-born King?

God, who had conducted the wise men to Judea, takes

on himself the guidance of their return. No sooner have they paid their adorations and presented their offerings to his blessed Son, than they are honored with a second message from the Almighty. They saw the star in the way, the angel at Bethlehem. The star directed their journey to Christ, the angel taught them to shun the presence of Herod—they saw the star by day, the angel by night. God, who had already spoken to their eyes, now addresses their hearts. No doubt they who had published the birth of the Messiah by their inquiry at Jerusalem, were not silent when they had found him at Bethlehem. What might they have expected but death, had they returned to the tyrant? Herod meditated destruction to the babe whom they sought—would he have spared those who openly acknowledged his rival? But the object of their mission being accomplished, He who sent them provides for their safety. When God countermanded Herod there was no hesitation whom to obey. Aware that they had every thing to expect from the usurper's fury, if (before they left Judea) he should discover that he had been mocked in his own territories by strangers, they were content to commit their way unto the Lord—they trusted in him—and his mercy brought to pass their deliverance.

The wise men once more in their native country, fill the world with expectation and wonder—while Joseph and Mary are yet in Jerusalem, ignorant of those dark stratagems which jealousy and suspicion were forming against the innocent Jesus. The city was full of rumors—but the object of them was concealed from the eye of curiosity or malice. How, when the blessed virgin prepares to return to Nazareth, (the destined place of her abode,) God prevents her by his angel, and sends her for security into Egypt.

It was not long since a messenger from heaven had appeared to Joseph, to attest the innocence of the mother and the divinity of the Son—he appears again for the pre-

servation of both, a preservation only to be effected by flight. No shadow of doubt intervenes, no disbelief perplexes this servant of God. He says not—"Is this the King who shall deliver Israel? If he be the Son of God, why is he subject to the violence of man? If he be almighty, why must he flee? Why depart from that land he comes to govern and to save?" The pious Joseph had learned better things from the angel. He had treasured in his mind the words and actions of the wise men, of Anna, of Simeon. He knew that faith was the evidence of things unseen. Implicitly relying on the power and wisdom of the God who thus signified his holy will, he believed, and wondered, and obeyed.

O strange condition of the King of glory! Even the lowly estate in which he was born will not afford that safety which is the best privilege attendant on poverty. There was no room for him, either in Bethlehem or in Judea—no sooner is he come to his own, than he must flee from them and betake himself into Egypt. How easily, O Savior, mightest thou have rescued thyself against Herod? How could an arm of flesh have prevailed against thy mighty power? Thou mightest have commanded fire to come down from heaven, or have bidden the earth open her mouth and swallow up thine enemies—but as thou wouldst be born poor and lowly, so thou wouldst live subject to human vexations, that having taught us how good it is to bear the yoke even in our youth, thou mightest sanctify to us early afflictions. Why then do the members complain if they partake of those sufferings which were patiently submitted to by their Head?

The life and the adversity of our Redeemer began together. Already did the sword pierce the blessed virgin's soul, while she clasped the heavenly infant to her bosom in all the anxiety of maternal tenderness, and trembled for his innocent life. Egypt itself was a Paradise, while it afforded him a place of refuge. His presence and his

safety were arguments of comfort in the midst of sorrow—a light which shone through surrounding darkness. And does the mother of Jesus flee for succor and preservation to the scene of Israel's past affliction, the once cruel, once inhospitable land which oppressed the people of God? What a change is here? Israel, the first-born of God, flees out of Egypt into Judea—Christ, the first-born of every creature, must flee from Judea into Egypt. O thou, who art every where present, every where the same, thou canst make all things tend to the deliverance of thy children. The fiery furnace, the den of lions, the deep and wide sea, the land of Egypt itself, can all by thy command become mansions of peace and security.

Joseph having received his charge in the night, delays not till morning. God said "Arise!" and he arose. Obedience hastened his departure; the charge was direct—the business important—he dares not tarry for the light, but departs at once towards Egypt. The tyrant had not yet so fully arranged his horrible designs as to make the removal of the holy family a matter of difficulty—thus far their poverty seems to have sheltered them from suspicion and procured them a peaceful introduction to the land of their pilgrimage. But they had greater and stronger protection—all the host of heaven encamped around the Savior of mankind—neither Herod nor the united force of the powers of darkness could prevail against him. In the region whither God himself had directed them to seek for refuge, they abide in peace and security till these calamities are overpast.

Meantime the sanguinary Herod laments his folly and infatuation, beholds all his stratagems fail of their effect, all his treachery prove abortive. In vain does he expect the return of the eastern sages. His falsely-assumed piety, his specious pretext of a design to worship the heavenly child, have neither engaged these illustrious converts in his service, nor marked out to him the object of his vin-

dictive terrors. He learns that the wise men are departed from Bethlehem—that they are returned into their own country—that his designs are baffled and counteracted both by God and man.

The chief priests and scribes had made him acquainted with the place where the Messiah should be born. He suspects not the flight of Jesus—he knows not the name, he cannot exactly ascertain the age of Him whom the sages had proclaimed King of the Jews. But now his anger passes all bounds, and his fear proves desperate. All the infants of Bethlehem shall bleed, that the rival of Herod may be among the slain. All, even to the age of two years, shall be included in the massacre. Some precious pretence is alleged for assembling into one place the inhabitants of the adjoining coasts. A tyrannous guiltiness never thinks itself safe; but still seeks further security in the excess of cruelty. He who had made such private inquiries after Christ, no doubt kept secret his abhorred design till the moment fixed on for its perpetration. Then, on a sudden the messengers of his fury rush in, tear the helpless victims from the arms of maternal love, and, without any regard to tears or entreaties, murder the innocent babes, and leave their wretched mothers in a state between madness and death. “In Ramah was there a voice heard—lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning—Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”

Behold the first fruits to God and to the Lamb! While their early age made them incapable of judging for themselves, their sufferings are accepted and recompensed with a martyr's crown. Summoned to the bosom of their heavenly Father, they escape the sorrows of a miserable world and enter at once into everlasting joy. There are they joined by an innumerable multitude of blessed souls, whom it has pleased God, from time to time, to take away in the dawn of life from the world unto himself—

happy objects of their Savior's love, who, even in their tender years, are ripe for glory.

The bloody, inhuman tyrant survives not long this odious execution—he could take away the lives of others—he could not protract his own. While he imagines that he has cut off his rival from the earth, and beguiled the star, and eluded the prophecies, he is summoned to the tribunal of that just God who maketh inquisition for guiltless blood. The ungodly in his pride doth persecute the poor—he lieth waiting secretly, as a lion lurketh in his den—he imagines wickedness, and practises it. But thou, O God, shalt bring him into the pit of destruction—*blood-thirsty* and *deceitful* men shall not live out half their days—Oh how suddenly do they consume, perish, and come to a fearful end!



#### 59.—CHRIST WITH THE DOCTORS IN THE TEMPLE.

The oppressor is no more—the voice of God recalls the holy family from their exile. That voice which had dismissed them into Egypt, bids them return without fear or hazard to their native country. There, in the retirement suited to his tender years, the blessed Jesus lives subject to his mother and to her husband. Yet even the spring shows us what we may expect from the approaching summer. In his childhood our Savior would give mankind a proof of his Divine graces, to prepare the world for that perfection which afterwards demonstrated him to be the power of God, and the wisdom of God. The sun would dazzle all eyes, if at its first rising it appeared in its fulness of strength—but the morning-star precedes that glo-



rious luminary, and the lively colors of the dawn proclaim its approach. Thus the eye is comforted, not overpowered by the appearance of the orb of light, when it cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course.

The blessed virgin went up to Jerusalem yearly at the feast of the passover, accompanied, even in his early youth, by the child Jesus. In all his actions he had a view to our instruction—he was not only “a sacrifice for sin, but also an example of godly life.” That example guides our first years into timely devotion. Happy are they whose childhood, spent in piety to God, sanctifies their riper age! He who rises early in the morning to pursue his journey, is more likely to meet with success than he who idly lingers till the day be far spent.

The inhabitants of Judea, according to the custom of their ancestors, went up by companies to the solemnity of their holy festival at Jerusalem. They went and they returned together. Friendship, combined with piety, is of itself a preparation for heaven—the journey, always delightful, affords new comfort by means of this blissful society. It is not the least benefit of our solemn assemblies, that the mutual encouragement of christians excites them to love and to good works. “I was glad when they said unto me, *Let us go into the house of the Lord.* Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself—for thither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.”

The blessed virgin having concluded her acts of devotion, departs from the holy city. Who can express the sorrow of her heart when, at eventide, she sought for Jesus among her kindred and acquaintance, and sought him in vain? How did she blame her credulous neglect in not attending to the precious charge. How did she regret that her eyes had ever been removed from the ob-

ject of her love? What imaginations of horror tortured her spirit! O Mary, has the successor of Herod, by more prosperous devices, prevailed against the childhood of that Son whose infancy was so miraculously preserved? Or has any want of duty or attention on thy part occasioned his absence? Or is he, without any previous notice, withdrawn from earth and returned to his heavenly glory?

Lord, who can but mourn when in a state of separation from thee? Who, that has seen the light of thy countenance can do otherwise than lament thy departure? Just is that grief, seasonable—are those tears which are bestowed on such a loss. What comfort can we receive without thee? What can afford us relief, or mitigate our distress, but thyself? If in thy presence is the fulness of *joy*, to be bereaved of thee is the fulness of *sorrow*, and all is darkness and desolation till thy return.

In vain is Christ sought among his kindred—his anxious mother returns to Jerusalem. She goes about the city, by the streets and open places, and seeks him whom her soul loveth—she seeks him, and finds him not. At last, on the third day, she enters into the temple of God. Where wert thou, O blessed Jesus, for the space of these three days? With whom didst thou take up thine abode? Who or where were thine attendants? Didst thou call on thy heavenly Father to support thee by miracle? Didst thou command the ministry of angels? Or didst thou deign to accept the hospitality of some highly-favored mortal? O God, what thou hast not revealed we presume not to inquire into—of this only are we assured, that thou hereby wouldst acquaint thy blessed mother with a portion of thy mighty power—and wouldst convince her, that not out of any indigence, but in merciful condescension, thou wouldst ordinarily depend upon her care.

In the mean time thy Divine wisdom could not but foreknow all those corroding thoughts with which the heart of thy fond parent would bleed during this painful sepa-

ration—yet wouldst thou leave her for a season to her sorrow. Even her who bare thee thou didst chasten with this early affliction. Never did any love thee who are not sometimes visited with thy correcting hand.

“ Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior.” Therefore dost thou withdraw thy face from thy servants, that they may experience the joy of recovering thee, and may be more anxious to retain thee. Thou hast said, who canst not lie, “ I am with you always, unto the end of the world ”—but sometimes while really present, thou thinkest good to be absent from our apprehensions. O Lord, if thou *leave* us thou wilt not *forsake* us—thou mayest leave us for our humiliation ; but thou wilt not forsake us to our final discomfort. If we seek thee, thou wilt be found of us—more especially if we seek thee in that place where thine honor dwelleth. None ever sincerely desire thy presence to whom thou dost refuse to manifest thyself, when it seemeth good in thy sight. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick—thine absence shall not by so long in its duration as to extinguish that light of our souls. In due season we shall find thee—and where shall we hope to find thee, if not in thy temple ? This is the habitation of the Lord of glory—this is the place of his rest for ever.

Ye who lament the departure of your Savior know where to direct your researches in sure confidence of success. In vain shall ye hope to find him amidst worldly cares or vain gratifications—let your steps be directed to the sanctuary—seek him with faith—seek him with piety—there shall ye meet him, there shall ye find him.

The Son of God had duties to perform in his Father’s house when those of his companions were ended—he tarried therefore, not to gaze with admiration on the outward glory and magnificence of the temple, but to hear the teachers of the law in their place of assembly, and to *impart*, while he seemed to *receive*, information. He from

whom ail knowledge is derived, hearkens, as the son of man, to the wisdom he had implanted in the wise. The Author of all learning sits in their school as an humble disciple—not yet called by his heavenly Father to his public function, he is contented to hear with diligence, to ask with modesty, and to teach only by gentle insinuation. Let all those consider this who deem it not necessary to await a solemn designation to the office of the ministry, according to the laws of God and man. Let them open their eyes and behold their Savior meekly sitting as an auditor amidst the Jewish teachers, and hearkening to the voice of instruction. Never did he preach unto the people till the solemn consecration of his Father, at his baptism, sent him forth to declare the counsel of God.

Behold the Son of God thus reverently placed at the feet of the doctors of Israel and seeking for the treasures of ancient wisdom. First, he hears, then he asks—how much more does it concern us to be hearers ourselves, ere we presume to be teachers of others! If we expend before we gather, we shall in vain hope to lay up the plentiful stores of useful and saving knowledge.

When he hath heard, he asks; and afterward he answers. Doubtless those very questions were instructions, and designed for the advantage of those to whom they were propounded. Never had these masters of Israel heard the voice of such a teacher—in whom the wisdom of God in part concealed itself, in part was discovered to mankind. No marvel that they all wondered at the understanding of their youthful associate—their eyes beheld nothing but human weakness—their ears heard Divine sublimity of matter—between both, their hearts were full of doubtful admiration. Why did ye not remember, O ye Jewish teachers, that a Child should be born, a Son given, whose name should be called Wonderful, *Counsellor*, the Prince of Peace? Why did ye not remember what the star, the sages, the angels, Zacharias, Simeon, Anna had

revealed in your days? Fruitless is that wonder which does not terminate in faith. No light is sufficient where the eyes are sealed up by prejudice or unbelief.

How did joy strive with astonishment in the heart of the blessed virgin when her eyes were fastened on her child! Forgetful of those higher claims, which in a calmer moment she could not but acknowledge, she breaks forth into a loving expostulation—"Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing!" Our Savior in his reply, not only accounts for his absence, but points out the momentous purpose which had occasioned it. Mary, in compliance with the supposition of the world, had spoken of Joseph as the father of Christ. The Son of God directs her thoughts from earth to heaven. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" The eternal Son of his eternal Father tells the daughter of man that all earthly considerations, of what nature soever, must give place to the God of spirits. She hears the just admonition and acquiesces in respectful silence. O thou who hast vouchsafed to call us thy children, by whose gracious adoption we are the sons of God, teach us to lay aside all earthly distractions, and dedicate our hearts to thee. One day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. Let us wait for thy loving-kindness, O Lord, in the midst of thy temple!



## 60.—CHRIST BAPTIZED.

In a state of separation from the world, and under the immediate tuition of heaven, John the Baptist was initiated into the mysteries of Divine wisdom. It is expedient

that solitude and contemplation should prepare the minister of the Gospel for the duties of his important office: the servant of God, who would faithfully discharge his high calling in public, must first qualify himself for that purpose in private. In the pursuit of heavenly knowledge, he must, as it were, converse with patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, holy men of God, who once adorned the church by their lives, and have continued since their death to edify it by their writings. He must have recourse to a state of calm retirement, where anxious cares and delusive pleasures may not break in upon him, to dissipate his attention—where no uncharitable spirit may blind his understanding or obstruct the illumination from above—where every bud of piety, sheltered from noxious blasts, may be gradually reared up into strength, and beauty, and fragrance—where, in a word, “he may wax strong in spirit until the day of his showing unto Israel.”

But the retirement of this blessed saint of God is finished, and he must now exchange the pleasures of contemplation for the scenes of active life—he must behold, with grief and indignation, the sins and follies of mankind, and encounter the opposition of a world that would not fail to take arms against a preacher of repentance.

Attracted by the uncommon sanctity of the Baptist, the inhabitants of the neighboring cities and villages repair in great numbers to the wilderness. They behold one coming forth on a sudden, like an inhabitant of another world, whose person, demeanor and manner of life were themselves an illustration of his doctrine. They behold one sent to prepare the way for Christ, and to bring the glad tidings of the Gospel—that mercy might save from the wrath which justice had denounced, and that Jesus might comfort those whom Moses had caused to mourn. Elijah reclaimed the people from the worship of Baal to that of the true Jehovah. John called his hearers

from unbelief, hypocrisy and vice, to faith, to holiness, and to God.

It was fit that He, whose coming into the world was foretold by prophets, and notified by angels; should be proclaimed by this his herald, when he should reveal himself to mankind. John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness—Christ was the Word of God himself. The voice of the messenger justly preceded the word of the Father, “*Repent ye—for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* A new and heavenly kingdom is about to be set up amongst you, under a heavenly king, the promised Messiah—and none but men of a temper and disposition corresponding to it can possibly become its subjects. I am the person commissioned to prepare you for your happy change by calling you to repentance, and to my baptism, which is the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, through faith in Him who cometh after me to confer pardon and forgiveness. I am the prophet foretold by Malachi and Isaiah, sent to prepare the way for Him who is your King and your God, now ready to be manifested as the Savior of men.”

Thus must the way be made for Christ in every heart—violence must be offered to our corruptions ere we can have room for grace. Never will he enter that soul where the herald of repentance hath not been before him.

At last the Sun of Righteousness begins to show itself to the world. After thirty years passed in retirement at Nazareth, the Redeemer of mankind appears, to enlighten them by his doctrine and refresh them by the influences of his grace. The vast concourse of all ranks of people attending on the Baptist at the river Jordan, rendered that the fittest place where the Messiah might first show himself to the world. He who knew no sin, would both be circumcised, to sanctify the past dispensation, and baptized, to consecrate the future; that so under both testa-

ments he might open a way into heaven for us, being made the righteousness of God in him.

Never till this moment had the forerunner of our Savior seen him whom he was commissioned to proclaim. Jesus was brought up at Nazareth—John in the wilderness—no interview had passed between them; lest the voice of infidelity should accuse them of acting in concert to favor each other's pretensions. When Jesus therefore came to be baptized, John had no knowledge of his person. Immediate revelation from God points out to the Baptist that the Lord's Anointed is before him. He hears the name, the place of abode of Jesus. While others prefaced their baptism by a solemn confession of sins, he beholds one whose whole life had been a life of unspotted innocence. This then could be no other than that Just One whose coming he had been taught to expect, and to whom the Almighty was about to bear witness from heaven.

Confounded at the thought that the master should thus humble himself before the servant, the Baptist modestly declines an honor he deemed too great even for the greatest of prophets—"I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" A sense of human infirmity, and a due estimation of the value of spiritual gifts, is the best trial of a regenerate heart. Our Blessed Savior denies not the assertion of his forerunner—but he will thus far exalt the Baptist and demean himself—"Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Thy mercy, O Lord, condescends to be beholden to thy creatures for those gifts which they originally received from thee. Made under the law, thou wouldst fulfil the righteousness of the law, consisting in an obedience to ceremonial rites as well as moral precepts. The counsels and appointments of God are "righteousness" itself. There needs no other motive, either to the servant or the Son, than the knowledge of those righteous purposes. This was



enough to lead the faithful heart through all difficulties—the unanswerable argument which challenged instant obedience. John accepts in all humility the high office to which his Savior hath called him—he gives baptism to the Redeemer of mankind. Others were baptized for the remission of their sins—now He through whose merits a sinful world obtains forgiveness unto life.

No sooner was Jesus baptized than he came up straightway out of the water—He stood on the brink of Jordan, a greater than Joshua, preparing to lead the people of God to the land of promise. There, O Savior, didst thou pour forth thy soul in prayer to thine almighty Father—there didst thou implore success in the great work thou hadst undertaken in behalf of a sinful world. What prayer of thine could ascend to heaven unheard? Lo, while thou prayest, the eternal Spirit of God descends on thy sacred head, and in a form emblematical of peace, and innocence, and purity, it rests upon thee. Thus did the Father consecrate thee to thine office—thus did he anoint thee with the Holy Ghost and with power. Long since had this astonishing event been foretold by thine evangelical prophet. Speaking in thine own person, he proclaimed to mankind, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek—he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound—to comfort them that mourn.” This day—it is thine own word—this day was the oracle of Jehovah fulfilled in the ears of thy people—for, lo, a voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

John bare record and said, “*Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.* Behold that blessed person, prefigured in the law and foretold by the prophets—one who is all meekness and innocence, patience and resignation, without offence in his lips, without guile

or malice in his heart, in whom dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. This is the Lamb, of which the patriarch Abraham spake to his son, that God would send him in due time—the Lamb, by the sprinkling of whose blood the true Israelites are preserved from the destroyer—the sacrifice, on which are laid the iniquities of us all—the Savior, who by expiating, taketh away the sin of the world and conferreth righteousness on them who will be conformed to his example. This, O all ye that behold him, this is he of whom I said, *after me cometh a man which is preferred before me—for he was before me.* His existence is from everlasting—he is fairer than the children of men—full of grace and truth—of Divine glory and celestial beauty, endued with the fulness of the Spirit, dispensing honor and immortality to mankind. He is the Son of God—he is the King of Israel!”



### 61.—CHRIST TEMPTED.

The water of baptism is succeeded by the fire of temptation. The Holy Spirit of God hath no sooner descended upon the blessed Jesus than he is called to encounter the powers of darkness. The more we are engaged in the service of God by our public vows, and by the Divine favor, the more is the rage of Satan exasperated against us. When we come forward into the field of battle, as members of a militant church, he labors to wrest our weapons from our hands or artfully to turn them against ourselves.

The voice from heaven had acknowledged Christ to be the Son of God. This glorious testimony does but inflame the malice of the enemy. The serpent swells with more malignant poison, and hastens to assault Him whom God hath honored from his throne. O Lord, how shall

a mortal escape that wicked one, when the Son of thy love could not be free—when grace itself draws on enmity? Will he who spared not to strike at the Head, forbear to attack the members? Arm thou us, O God, with expectation of that evil we cannot avoid—make thou us as intrepid as the tempter is malicious—let thy strength be made perfect in our weakness—so we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us.

During the time that our Savior dwelt in his peaceful retirement, Satan bent not his forces against him—now, that he meditates the public exercise of his sacred office, he must be prepared for all the fiery darts of the wicked. O Savior, who can sufficiently wonder at the presumption of that apostate spirit who dares oppose himself to the Son of the everliving God? Who can sufficiently admire thy meekness and patience, which would condescend to be thus tempted? The rashness of thine adversary is exceeded by thine own humility. If a state of innocence could have afforded an exemption, the first Adam would not have been thus assaulted, much less the second. But, O gracious Lord, how glorious was it for thee, how happy for us, that thou wert tempted! Hadst thou not been assailed, how shouldst thou have overcome? Without a conflict there can be no triumph, no victory—how had thy power been manifested if no antagonist had waged war against thee? The first man is of the earth, earthly—the second man is the Lord from heaven—the first was tempted, and he was subdued—the second was tempted, and overcame. How boldly then may we approach the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace in time of need? We have not a Savior who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Lord, in viewing thy conflict with thine adversary we see the manner of his assault—we see how he is resisted, how he is overcome. If the sins to which he tempts us are of

the most atrocious nature, we remember that thou wast solicited to infidelity, to covetousness, to idolatry. Being troubled on every side, we are not perplexed—being persecuted, we are not in despair. How glorious was it for thee therefore, O Savior, how happy for thy servants, that thou wert tempted!

But whither, O blessed Jesus, didst thou go to encounter thine adversary and ours? That the glory of thy victory might be greater, thou didst retire into the waste howling wilderness, the haunt of wild beasts, a scene of horror and desolation. There didst thou remain during the space of forty days, fasting, solitary, exposed to the various attacks of the malicious enemy. The time of thy rigorous abstinence corresponded with that of thy great forerunners, Moses and Elias. At the accomplishment of the law and the promulgation of the Gospel, thou, the Redeemer of mankind, thoughtest fit to fast forty days and forty nights, that (by an act designed for our wonder, rather than our precise imitation) thou mightest teach us how to invest ourselves with spiritual armor.

He who would suffer death for our sakes, would also suffer hunger—in the fast, he manifested his mighty power—in the cessation of it, the truth of his manhood. Moses and Elias, through the miraculous support afforded them from above, had fasted as long a time—after these precedents the Author of our salvation abstained from food till he deemed it expedient to prevent all cavils against the verity of his human nature. To prove that there was no difference between him and his creatures (save only that he was exempt from sin) he would be supported with food—would fast—would hunger. O Savior, why should thy children be discouraged in the want of earthly comforts, when they behold thee thus destitute of society, and voluntarily abstaining from sustenance?

No sooner does Christ begin to suffer hunger, than the adversary is at hand with his temptations. Vainly sup-

posing that he has espied a vulnerable part, he commences his assault without delay. We have a foe no less vigilant than malicious—one who will watch every opportunity to injure us—one who will not forego the least possible advantage. How should we guard ourselves against this mighty adversary! How should we labor for our own safety, while he seeks with so much activity to effect our destruction!

Our Savior was an hungered—Satan tempts him in respect to food—he knew that this was not the moment for avarice or ambition to offer their illusions—he adapts the trial to the circumstances—he directs the weapons of his warfare where they are most likely to sink deep into the soul.

In every temptation there is an appearance of good, whether it respects the mind, the body, or the estate. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life oppose themselves to various duties. The progenitor of mankind was assaulted by these, and was subdued—the Redeemer was tempted by them, and was triumphant. The stones were to be made bread—the guard of angels was to be presumed on—the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were to be purchased by apostacy and profanation!

Satan was not a stranger to the record God had given of his beloved Son. The message and the acclamations of the heavenly host; the supernatural light of the star; the homage of the eastern sages—the testimony of more than one faithful servant of God—the various predictions of the inspired prophets—all these were present to his mind. Yet now, beholding the object of his jealousy and malice oppressed with hunger, and not comprehending how such infirmities were consistent with his Divine nature, he presumes to approach him with a supposition, in itself the grossest of all calumnies—“If thou be the Son of God.” On the establishment of this truth nothing less depends

than the eternal salvation of mankind. How should he have ransomed the world, how should he have obliterated the sentence of death, how should he have reconciled all things to himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven, had he been otherwise than the Son of God ? To undermine this important basis of our faith has ever been the grand object of our spiritual enemy—to assert and to maintain this truth must ever be the christian's glory.

There is nothing more common with our spiritual enemy than to take occasion by our wants to move us to sin. He seeks to tempt our Savior to distrust the providence of his eternal Father, to abuse his marvellous powers, to work a miracle at the suggestion of hell. It had been easy for thee, blessed Lord, to have foiled thine adversary by the exertion of thine omnipotence—but thou wouldst vanquish him by the sword of thy Spirit, to teach us how to resist and overcome the powers of darkness. Assisted by this Divine armor, we may also be victorious. Nothing can resist an assault of this perilous nature but the revelation of our God. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes—O take not the word of thy truth utterly out of my mouth. Let thy testimonies be my delight and my counsellors—let those be my songs in the house of my pilgrimage ; so shall I make answers unto my blasphemers—for my trust is in thy word.

Our Savior shows the tempter, from the highest of all authority, that his suggestions are unfounded—that man lives not merely by his daily food, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God ; who can either support his creatures without bread, or give it them by miracle, or multiply miraculously that which is given. All things are sustained by that almighty word which created them. We live by bread, but God makes it the means of our preservation—through his providence alone it affords us nourishment. Should he withdraw his hand from his creatures, they would languish and expire—in the midst of abun-

dance they would inevitably perish. "When thou hidest thy face they are troubled—when thou takest away their breath they die and return to their dust." Why do we turn our eyes to the instrument and forget that gracious power who gives it efficacy? Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord Jehovah—whom he hath chosen to be his inheritance. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, and upon them that put their trust in his mercy, to deliver their souls from death, and to feed them in time of famine.



62.—CHRIST TEMPTED.—*continued.*

In the first assault the enemy of mankind moved our Savior to doubt his Father's providence, and to use unlawful means for the support of nature—in the next, he tempts him to presume on his Father's protection, and the service of his blessed angels. It is not one repulse which discountenances this bold and unwearied opponent—if we cannot be sunk into despair he seeks to lift us up to arrogance and pride. Temptations, like waves of the sea, follow each other in rapid succession. While we are in this warfare we must not expect a respite when it was denied to the Captain of our salvation.

O Savior, the wilderness was fitted for a trial arising from want—when thine adversary would solicit thee to vain-glory, he carried thee to the pinnacle of the temple. There, not ashamed to stand by thee, he presumed to address thee in words like these—"Thou didst refuse to depend on aught save the bounty of thy Father with respect to thy food—thou wouldst be sustained by

his power rather than thine own—I now call on thee, if thou be the Son of God, to make further trial of his providence, and to challenge the ministry of his angels for thy miraculous preservation. Cast thyself down headlong from this height. Behold, thou art here in Jerusalem, the great and holy city—thou art on the highest pinnacle of that temple which is dedicated to thy Father, and (if thou partakest of his Divine nature) to thyself. Thou canst not devise a more compendious method of extending thy glory, and making proclamation of thy Godhead. The eyes of all men will be upon thee. All the world will adore thy power and bow to thine omnipotence. Does the danger appal thee? What can hurt him who is the Son of God? To what purpose art thou surrounded by attendant spirits, who are commissioned by thy Father to watch over thee and keep thee? In this one act thou wilt assert thy glory without prejudice to thy security. Rely on thy Father, and on the guardianship of his angels—Cast thyself down.”

O thou malignant Spirit, why did not the presumptuous hand which raised the Savior of mankind to that giddy height, itself precipitate him thence? Was it that thou soughtest the destruction not of his sacred body, but of his soul? Or was thy power restrained by an almighty arm from being subservient to thy malice? He who had permitted thee to lift him up, forbade thee to cast him down. Wo to us, if thy destructive fury were uncontrolled! Blessed be his name who hath said unto thee, as to the raging sea, Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further—and here shall thy pride and thy malevolence be stayed.

How many faithful servants of their Master are called to a conflict of this nature with the enemy of their salvation! He exalts them, that their fall may be more deadly; he suggests to them proud ideas of their own merit or holiness, that they may incur the displeasure of their God.



While the Father of mercies humbles his children that he may bring them to glory, Satan lifts up that he may cast down, and in their advancement purposes their overthrow. There is not a more venomous or deadly shaft in his quiver than this encouragement to depend on our infallible claim on the Divine favor. "Thou art the elected and redeemed of God—sin, because grace hath abounded—sin, that it *may* abound. Thou art safe, though thou offend—be not a foe to thine own liberty." Alas, is it a proof of liberty that we transgress the law of liberty? Is not this the most galling of all servitude? What is our spiritual freedom but a freedom of *sin*? O thou, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life, teach us, having this precious hope, to purify ourselves even as he is pure. We are bought with a price, let us glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's. Let a sense of our adoption lead us to reverence and obey thee—*because* we are sons, let us not cast ourselves down into sin.

But in what language does Satan enforce his presumptuous request? "It is written, *He shall give his angels charge over thee!*" Let no man wonder to hear the Scriptures quoted by hypocrites and false pretenders to religion, when the prince of darkness himself endeavors to pervert them to his purpose. Still, the word is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Shall we abstain from our necessary food because instances have occurred wherein it has been made a vehicle for deadly poison? It is not the letter of the Scriptures, but the spirit, which is proper for doctrine, for instruction in righteousness—if we separate the one from the other, we profane that word no less than Satan did. Behold that apostate spirit converted into an angel of light! behold him veiling his murderous purpose under a mask of holiness! If hypocrisy seeks to deceive with an affectation of zeal and piety, we

see from whence it has its origin. Alas, how many souls are endangered by the abuse of that word, which in itself is a guide to salvation? O God, who hast given us light, grant us a right judgment in all things, that we may perceive and enjoy the light thou hast afforded us. Teach us, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and we shall keep them unto the end—we shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free.

O false application of that most sure promise by which the Father of mercies speaketh comfort to his children! Yea, Lord, thou *will* give thine angels charge over us. We are never unattended—we are in the midst of a guard, though invisible, yet careful and mighty to protect us. Though the world insult and despise us, the angels of God are our associates and our defenders—no walls, no prisons can separate them from us—they go down into the christian's dungeon, they partake of his exile—how can he either fear danger or complain of solitude, when he has so inseparable, so glorious companions?

The blessed Jesus will yet have recourse to Scripture, though Satan had misapplied it. Lo, he takes the sword from that impious hand and foils him with his own weapons—"It is written, *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*" Wheresoever the oracles of truth appear to be involved in difficulty, that difficulty will vanish if we compare spiritual things with spiritual. "It is true, O Satan, that God hath given this charge, and that his holy angels have undertaken it. He will preserve his children, but not in their sins—they may trust him, they may not tempt him—he seeks to encourage their faith, not their presumption. To cast ourselves on any immediate providence, when we have the ordinary means of safety, is to disobey, not to believe in God. We may rely on what he has promised; but we must not subject his promises to our capricious inclinations—fully assured of his power, his justice, his mercy, we have recourse to them in time of need, but we

do not make trial of them to gratify our vain devices." All the ingenuity of Satan could not elude the force of this Divine answer—he now sees how vainly he had tempted Christ to spiritual pride.

Yet again do we behold him (as not despairing of the victory) endeavoring to shake the constancy of the Son of God by the offer of earthly dignity. He could neither move him to distrust nor presumption—but he has other arrows within his quiver. If we are not victorious in all our conflicts with the adversary, it is in vain that we plume ourselves on any partial triumph.

From the pinnacle of the temple our Savior is suddenly transported to an exceeding high mountain. That which Balak had once done by his instigation, Satan himself attempts—he seeks, by frequent change of place, to attain the object of his wishes. If retirement will not move us, we are called into public life—if we escape this danger, we are thrown once more into solitude—no place is free from his malice—none should be made prejudicial by our negligence.

The kingdoms round about Judea were represented to the eye of our Savior—the glory of them to his imagination. "Where wouldst thou look for pomp, or majesty, or pleasure, in comparison with the courts of kings? There is gorgeous apparel, honorable attendance, royal state—there are rich jewels, sumptuous feasts, magnificent triumphs. Will not these awaken thine ambition?" O false and treacherous deceiver! How artfully is all the care attendant on exalted stations concealed from the view, while every thing is brought forward which can allure or captivate? Thus is it ever his fatal policy to varnish over his temptations. Might they be viewed in their genuine colors, in vain should he attempt to prevail. Now, when he solicits us to evil, he conceals the stings of conscience, the wrath of God, the terror of judgment, the mansions of sorrow—nothing appears to the eye but

pleasure, profit, and a seeming happiness in the enjoyment of our desires—he reserves those objects of wo for our later hours, when he who had been once a parasite becomes a tyrant, and makes us know and feel how evil and bitter a thing it is to depart from the living God.

But who shall paint the presumption which dared approach the Son of God with the specious promise, “All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me?” On what base, what vile conditions does the accursed spirit offer the whole world to the Maker of it! With what effrontery does he promise kingdoms to the Lord of lords, if he may but be adored by the great object of adoration in heaven and earth! O Satan, had thy blasphemous proposition been complied with, how wouldst thou have accomplished thy word? Not by thee, but by the Almighty, do kings reign, and princes decree justice. The powers that be are ordained of God. Thine assertion was no less false than sacrilegious. What but deception can be looked for from the father of lies! Fidelity and truth are the progeny of heaven. Faithful is He that hath promised, who also will do it.

The blessed Jesus, who with respect to his Divine nature thought it not robbery to be equal with God, could not without just indignation hear of this impious rivalry. Nor yet does he have recourse to his uncontrolable power, that he may drive away the malignant spirit—he repels him, not by the thunder of his wrath, but by the resistless force of holy Scripture—“It is written, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*” Here was no place for reply, no room for evasion. In the shame and confusion of a total defeat, the adversary of God and man betakes himself to flight, and hides his guilty head in the regions of darkness.

We cannot be delivered from the importunate solicitations of that wicked one, but by continued resistance. He who thus triumphed over the malignity of Satan will also

befriend his faithful servants—he will strengthen, he will help, he will uphold them by the right hand of his power. He will have their faith and their constancy exercised but he will not give them over unto death. In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.

O Lord, in thee have we trusted—let us never be confounded.



### 63.—SIMON PETER CALLED.

The conflict with the powers of darkness is at an end, and victory hath crowned the Son of God. For this purpose was he manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. O sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously! Thou didst arise, O Savior, and thine enemies were scattered—they also which hated thee fled before thee. Like as the smoke vanisheth, so didst thou drive them away—like as wax melteth at the fire, so did they disappear from before the presence of God. Now does thy heavenly Father remove thine hunger by a supply of celestial food. Those holy angels (on whose miraculous aid thou didst refuse to presume by rushing into unnecessary danger) now approach with songs of congratulation. They celebrate thy first triumph, the prelude to other and greater glories. Salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ even now begin to appear—even now is the accuser of the brethren taught to expect his future and final overthrow. With what transports, O Lord, did the blessed children of light set forth thy praises! How did they deem themselves invested with an increase of glory and felicity, when they were commissioned to minister to their Creator!

Encouraged and succored by heaven, unconquered by all the malice of hell, our Savior goeth forth in the strength of the Lord God. He is fully prepared for that great and mighty work to which his own mercy and the will of his eternal Father had ordained him. The voice of him that cried in the wilderness was heard there no longer. Already was the great fore-runner of the Messiah cast into prison by the jealousy of a cruel tyrant, who afterwards spared not his life. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

He who had been "seen of angels," will now select his chosen followers from among mankind, as ministers and eye-witnesses of the word. Neither the great nor the honorable, nor the learned, nor the mighty, are called. The nobles and sages of Judea must resign this distinguished privilege to the humble fishermen of Galilee.

As the sun at its first rising attracts all eyes by its radiance, so did the Sun of Righteousness when he first shone forth into the world. His miraculous cures brought patients—his heavenly doctrine brought auditors—both united to call together the admiring multitude. Why do we not still follow thee, O Savior, whithersoever thou goest, that we may be healed, that we may be instructed? It was thine own prediction, that when thou wert lifted up, thou wouldst draw all men unto thee. Long since thou hast been lifted up as a sacrifice for our sins on thy cross—as the only begotten Son of God on the throne of thy glory. Thy word is still the same—it is equally efficacious to enlighten the understanding and to remove the diseases of the soul. "Draw us, and we shall run after thee."

The people not only follow Christ, but press upon him—delighted with his sacred word, they importunately throng around the speaker—they would not lose one accent which may fall from his lips. Yet doth not our Savior check the boldness of their zeal, but rather encoura-

ges and applauds it. That the kingdom of heaven should be sought after with earnestness, displeases not him who speaketh unto every one of us in the tender language of a Father, "My son, give me thine heart!"

Meanwhile the increasing multitude of auditors constrains him to leave the shore, and to instruct them from a small ship which was Simon's, stationed on the adjoining lake. His Divine power, which had made the sea and the dry land, causes both to contribute to the benefit of his children.

After a night of unsuccessful labor Simon was employed in washing his nets, when he was honored with the presence of the Savior of mankind. The fisherman, who had seen the people flock after Christ, who had heard him speak with so much power, could not but conceive a general and confused apprehension of some excellent worth in such a teacher, and therefore gladly receives into his ship this Messenger of salvation. A mind thus disposed was judged not unworthy of future honor—already is Simon prepared to be a disciple of Christ—already hath his fervent spirit devoted him to the service of his Redeemer.

Blessed Lord, who shall fail of a recompence that ministers unto thee? No sooner is thy sermon ended, than thou commandest the admiring fisherman to launch forth into the deep, and let down his nets for a draught. In thy miracles thou wouldst ever improve, not counteract the powers of Nature—thou wouldst meet her in her own bounds, and when she had done her utmost, wouldst supply the rest by thine omnipotence. The same power which could have caused the waters to retire and leave their treasures on the sands of the lake, commanded Simon to launch out into the deep.

Rather in a desire to obey and gratify the prophet, than in hope of advantage to himself, the son of Jonas obeys—had Christ enjoined a harder task he would not have refused—now, though he had spent the night in unprofita-

ble labor, the day shall witness his ready compliance. Often does the Divine providence, after disappointing our more sanguine expectations, give a blessing, at a time and in a manner we dared not even hope—"When they had so done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, so that their net brake."

Who would not obey thee, blessed Lord, since thou dost so bountifully requite our weakest services? Yet didst thou not merely intend retribution in this event; thou hadst in view the instruction of thy convert. The act itself was not without its spiritual signification. He who should be made a fisher of men, in this draught foresees his success—"The kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea, which, when it is full, men draw to land." No sooner does Simon Peter the apostle preach Jesus and the resurrection, (after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon his head,) than three thousand souls are added to the church of Christ. O powerful voice of the glorious Gospel, which can draw sinful men from the abyss of natural corruption into the blessed liberty of the children of God! O happy souls, who when they hear the word of God, keep it, and bring forth fruit to life eternal!

Abundance is sometimes as troublesome as want—the net of Simon is broken by the draught of fishes—but he is not without assistance or relief. There cannot be a duty more incumbent on mankind, than that they should help each other in all honest and lawful industry. Wherefore hath God made us partners and associates, while on this troublous sea of mortality, but that we should give and receive comfort when requisite, that we should love as brethren, that we should rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep?

Simon well knew that this draught was not according to the laws of nature. Without regard to the sudden and unexpected advantage, he falls down at the feet of Jesus—turns his eyes from the act of the Author—acknow-



ledges his own vileness, and our Savior's majesty—"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" O Peter, thy Lord is come to call thee, and others, by thee, unto blessedness—and dost thou say, "Depart from me!" Surely it was the voice of astonishment, the voice of humility, the voice of reverential fear, which proceeded from thy grateful lips. Because thou art a sinner, thou art *in need* of a Savior—because thou dost acknowledge thy sinfulness, Christ delights to abide with thee, and will receive thee into his more immediate favor. Happy is that man who abases himself before God. O blessed disciple, thou couldst not more effectually secure the privilege afforded thee, than by this meek confession of unworthiness. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Complain of thine own infirmities, pour out thine heart to Him who knows its weakness, and thou shalt be satisfied with the abundance of his mercy. He whom thou lovest will not depart from a contrite spirit—"Fear not; I will make thee henceforth a fisher of men."

Lo, this humility is succeeded by an apostleship—Simon pleads no longer his ignorance or insufficiency. Christ hath declared that his grace shall be present with his servant, and what he hath promised he is able to perform. Lord, how much skill, and labor, and patience is requisite for this spiritual calling! Who can, without thine especial aid, discharge it to thy glory, to the edification of others, and to his own everlasting salvation? All things are of thee, O God: give thy blessing to those who preach, and to those who hear thy word—let the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, and may enter into the joy of our Lord. Amen.

## 64.—THE MARRIAGE IN CANA.

Our blessed Lord would now “make full proof of his ministry.” The draught of fishes, which had brought conviction to the minds of those immediately concerned, and had increased the number of his followers, might yet have been accounted for by a reference to natural causes. The Son of God thought it good to manifest his glory by a miracle evidently beyond the powers of nature, that he might confirm the faith of his newly-called disciples, and that his works might bear witness that the Father had sent him.

And was this thy first miracle, O Savior, that thou wroughtest in Cana of Galilee? Hadst thou dwelt thirty years upon earth without making public demonstration of thine omnipotence? Did thy Divinity so long remain shrouded in the retirement of an obscure province in Judea, unknown to that world thou camest to redeem? Wouldst thou so long restrain the patient expectation of those, who since the appearance of a star from heaven had waited for the revelation of the Messiah? Alas, with what pomp of ostentation does the pride of mortals display their trivial excellence, while thou, who didst not receive the Holy Spirit by measure, art content in thine humble station, and concealest that power which made the world, in one of the cottages of Nazareth! Which of all thy miracles is more worthy of astonishment than this demonstration of thy humility?

Yet while thy wisdom thought fit to withhold the manifestation of thyself from the eyes of thy countrymen, thy blessed mother could not remain in ignorance. From the moment of thy birth she had kept and pondered in her heart the various proofs of thy pre-eminence and glory. No doubt the long season of thy retirement afforded her more convincing evidence, from day to day, that thou wert indeed the Christ, the chosen of God.

The first public display of Christ's almighty power graceth a marriage. It is an ancient and laudable custom, that this holy rite should not be without its due solemnity of celebration. He who gave his blessing to the union of our first parents in their paradise, bestows his first miracle on a Galilean marriage—he who authorized and sanctified the nuptial vow, by his holy presence does honor to his own ordinance. Happy are they, who, in this important act of their lives, place their best hope on the smiles of a gracious God. Thus is Christ even now present with his faithful servants—his Spirit his gracious benediction come down upon his altar, and hallow the resemblance of his eternal union with his church.

It was no rich or splendid festival, to which Christ (with his mother and his disciples) vouchsafed to come from the further parts of Galilee—probably some of the kindred of Mary had requested of our Savior to bless their nuptials with his attendance. We find him not at the magnificent banquets or sumptuous triumphs of the great—the pride and luxury of the world but ill agreed with the lowly condition he had chosen—he is present where the poverty of his host cannot furnish wine enough, even at a bridal-feast. Mary, in charitable compassion, and desire to maintain the decency of hospitable entertainment, inquires into the necessities of her friend, pities them, and will at least endeavor to afford them relief. When they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, “They have no wine.” She is aware of the necessitous state of a poor Israelite, and is studious to remove the cause of his anxiety. If our thoughts are solely fixed on our abundance, or even on our own indigence, to the neglect of others, we are not worthy to be called by the name of our Savior.

To whom should complaint be made of want, but to the Maker and Giver of all things? The blessed virgin knew to whom she sued; she was not unacquainted either with the power or the benignity of her son. No doubt

the bridegroom, who "dwelt among his own people," might have procured among his friends and neighbors an adequate supply for the remainder of the feast; but the liberal fountain of every good was present, and ready to afford that requisite assistance. Whither should we betake ourselves, blessed Lord, in all our necessities, but to thine infinite munificence, which giveth abundantly to all men and upbraideth not? We cannot want, we cannot abound, but with thy permission. Give us what thou wilt—teach us to be contented, and thankful for that which thou givest.

Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Though as a son he was in subjection to his earthly parent, he was still the assertor of his eternal glory—neither time nor method might be prescribed to him for any act of his omnipotence. Even the blessed virgin herself must be admonished, lest she presume on her natural authority by having recourse to it for things supernatural and divine. He whose mildness and condescension never dismissed a suppliant ungratified, would not frown on her who bare him; he who had commanded us to honor and revere our parents would not himself treat his mother with disdain. But with respect to his heavenly and spiritual nature, it was necessary that he should point out the limits, which no mortal, how highly favored soever, might be permitted to exceed. O blessed Mary, if in thy state of ineffable happiness thou dost notice what is passing here below, how dost thou pity and reject the presumptuous superstition of vain men, whose invocations make thee a solicitor for blessings from above! How falsely they do assert thy glory, who pay thee the homage which belongeth to God only! How unwelcome are those honors which are sacrilegiously taken from thy Redeemer and ours, the great, the only Mediator between God and man!

Even on that just and necessary rebuke the mother of

Jesus can build a foundation of hope. If the hour of Christ's manifestation of himself was not actually come, it was not therefore far distant: when the expectation of the guests and the necessity of the occasion have prepared the way for the miracle, it shall be demonstrated to their joy and wonder. While she hears with reverence the words of her Son, she directs her speech to the attendants on the feast; "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Obedience to the commands of Christ is a fit preparation for our receiving the dispensations of his bounty. In the present instance, as in all others, his power was independent of his creatures: he could have wrought wonders had they refused to obey him, but their contumacy and perverseness might have prevented his miraculous favors. He who by his grace enlightens the understanding, will not detract from the value of his gifts by subjecting them to the blasphemous scorn of the obdurate and rebellious.

In the guest-chamber were six water-pots of stone, placed there for the purpose of outward purification. As if sin was merely external, and had not its seat in the inmost soul, the superstitious Jews imagined holiness to consist in frequent ablutions. Many less innocent traditional ceremonies had been engrafted on the simplicity of their ancient law. Water is made by Christ himself the emblem of washing away sin, in token that the heart must be cleansed if we would find acceptance with God; and how shall this be effected but by means of that precious blood which taketh away the sins of the world? Through the all-powerful efficacy of this fountain, opened for sin and for uncleanness, O Lord, renew a right spirit within us; wash us, and we shall be whiter than snow!

The attendants hear with astonishment the command of Jesus to fill the water-pots with water. But the injunctions of Mary, and their own sentiments of him whom they revered as a prophet and teacher of righteousness, led them to obey with cheerfulness, and patiently to

wait the issue. O Savior, that mighty word which changed water into wine could at once have caused these vessels to overflow, as by some new creation; but in all thy miracles thou didst ground thy mighty works upon former existences: thou didst multiply the bread—thou didst cause the pool of Siloam to bring sight to the blind—thou didst restore the withered limbs. In the present instance thou didst that instantaneously which thine ordinary providence accomplishes by insensible degrees, according to the laws of vegetable nature. Thy bounty bringeth forth “grass for the cattle, and herb for the service of man—that thou mayest bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”

How liberal are the provisions of Christ! How doth he display his munificence, his power, his mercy! It is our sin and our shame if we abuse his favors by perverting them to the purposes of riot and intemperance. He is ever attentive to the necessities and to the comfort of his creatures; but he hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any man license to sin. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of our God.

There is a marriage to which we are all invited, and wherein we are all most nearly interested; there shall we not be guests only, but shall be “betrothed to our God in truth and righteousness.” The sound shall go out into all lands, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him!” Even so come, Lord Jesus. In thy presence is the fulness of joy—at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore. Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Amen.

## 65.—THE GOOD CENTURION.

How vast, how extensive were the mercies of redeeming love! With what gracious condescension did the Savior of mankind receive those who came to him without any prejudice or partial exclusion! Of a truth, O God, thou art no respecter of persons. In every nation he that feareth thee and worketh righteousness is accepted in thy sight. For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter—whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Even the bloody trade of war afforded disciples to the Prince of Peace. Amidst the Roman legions was found one who did homage to that Jesus whom so many Jews despised. If this centurion was an alien by birth, he was in disposition an Israelite indeed; he loved the nation which was chosen of God, and patronized the established worship, to which he was himself no mean benefactor. The brave and loyal servant of Cæsar builds a synagogue to the honor of Jehovah.

Desirous of procuring (in behalf of a faithful domestic) the benefit of those miraculous powers which already caused the fame of Jesus to be diffused throughout all Judea, the centurion approaches our ever-blessed Savior. He comes with no rude or importunate application, but in all the meekness of an humble suppliant. He avails himself of the intercession of his friends before he offers his petition in person: the elders of the Jews readily state the merits and pretensions of this zealous proselyte, and request our Lord's benevolent assistance. Meanwhile the pious Roman, to avoid all imputation of negligence, seconds their efforts with his own. Cold and fruitless are the exertions of others, if our lips are silent where it most

becomes us to speak. Alas! did we but address God for our own souls with that fervency wherewith the centurion sought relief for this his servant, when would our petitions fail of success? But what marvel is it if God refuse to grant us his spiritual blessings, when we refuse to entreat for them at all, or solicit them with cold and careless indifference? We have not, because we ask not; we ask, and we receive not, because we ask amiss.

Various were the characters and situations of those who resorted to Christ, imploring his charitable aid. One besought him for a son, another for a daughter; here a good and liberal master offers his earnest supplications in favor of his servant stricken with the palsy. He first, with the tenderest compassion, provides all things for the sufferer's relief and comfort under his own roof, and then seeks to the Savior of mankind in humble but earnest entreaty: "Lord, my servant lieth at home, sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." Had the *master* been sick, the most faithful servant could not have done more. He is unworthy of the benefits which arise from the services of those beneath him, who is unwilling to recompense those services by a generous protection and patronage. An imaginary superiority must not lead us to neglect the duties of christian charity; while we behold our servants on earth, we must remember that we have a Master in heaven.

O that every penitent and faithful heart would approach the Author of life, and earnestly implore his assistance! "Lord, my soul is grievously tormented by unbelief—by self-love—by vain and inordinate desires." It were unnecessary to say more. The mercy of God would need no further entreaty, but would cheer the suppliant in the gracious language wherewith our Savior addressed this Roman proselyte—"I will come, and I will heal."

Blessed Lord, what thou didst promise to one thou hast performed in behalf of all. We were sick unto death; our sins had taken hold on us, and the life of grace was



gone. Thou didst behold us from heaven, and, having found a ransom, thou camest down into this miserable world, and in thine own person didst vouchsafe to heal us. We shall not die, but live, and declare thy works, O Lord. O teach us to praise thee aright for that admirable mercy which thus abased thee, that so our humility may imitate thy condescension—that a sense of our own unworthiness may lead us to form a just estimate of the wonders of love!

Christ would go down and visit the sick servant: the master of that servant saith, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." The Jewish elders who had mediated for him dwelt on his merits; when he comes to plead for himself he confesses, "I am not worthy." They saw in him one in authority, a founder of a synagogue, a patron of religion; he waves all these specious pretensions, and says, "Alas! Lord, I am not worthy. I am a Gentile, an alien, a man of blood; thou art holy—thou art all-powerful." True humility teaches us to esteem the perfections of others, and to set no immoderate value on our own. Pride, on the contrary, shows us nothing but matter of admiration in ourselves—of contempt in those around us. While the good centurion thinks thus meanly of himself, his exalted faith teaches him to think aright of our blessed Savior's omnipotence; "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Nothing but a Divine power is unlimited; that power is committed by the Father to the Son. At thy word, O Jesus, our sins shall be forgiven—our souls shall be healed—our bodies shall be raised from the grave—our whole man shall be translated to life everlasting.

Whereupon was the steady confidence of this centurion grounded? He saw how powerful his own word was with those under his command, the force whereof extended even to absent performances; well, therefore, might he argue, that if a mere mortal found such ready obedience

paid to his commands, the most obstinate disease must yield to the supreme power of the Messiah. Cheerful and diligent service had obtained for the sufferer in question the favorable care of a benevolent master. Why do we forfeit our title to His favor to whom we owe all submission and allegiance! Alas! when he commands us to "do this," we do it not—if he prohibits us, we do it. He says, "Go from the world"—we fly to it. He says, "Come unto me"—we depart far from him. Alas! this is not service, but enmity. How can we look for favor, while we return rebellion? We have a gracious Master: there can be no duty of ours which he sees not—which he acknowledges not—which he crowns not. We could not but be happy if we were obedient.

He whose Divine grace wrought this faith in the century, approves it, not without expressions of wonder. When he first framed the heaven and the earth, he beheld with pleasure all things that he had made; with equal pleasure he contemplates the graces of a regenerate heart. Our wealth, our beauty, our wisdom, our learning, our honor may make us accepted by men, but it is faith only which exalts us in the sight of God. The glory of the Roman convert is the shame of Israel. Amidst all that once-favored people there had appeared no such example of virtue. We look for a plenteous harvest where the soil has received diligent cultivation; if it be less fruitful than the untilled ground, how just is the disappointment and sorrow of the husbandman! Our blessed Lord withholds not this testimony from the people; he utters it in their ears, that he may at once awaken their shame and emulation. In all things, save those of a spiritual nature, our self-love makes us impatient of superiors, and even of equals; how can we with guilty complacency see others overtake us, and leave us at a distance, in the path which leads to heaven!

Christ, who had wrought this faith, disdains not to re-

ward it: "Go thy way; and, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." The master's piety brings health and deliverance to the servant. His cure is perfected at that very hour. O Savior, how powerful is thine intercession with thine almighty Father! What can we want while thou art a Mediator for us? In thee is our happiness, our health, our salvation, our glory. To thee, therefore, O mighty Redeemer of Israel, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, infinite and incomprehensible, be all praise, and honor, and adoration, for ever and ever. Amen.



#### 66.—THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED.

In what rapidity of succession were the favors of our beneficent Savior conferred upon mankind! He went about doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by sickness, sorrow, and even death itself; for God was with him. No sooner has he called the centurion's servant from the bed of languishing, than he raises the widow's son from the bier.

The fruitful showers are not ordained to fall all on one field. Nain must partake of the bounty of Christ as well as Cana or Capernaum. The sun diffuses light and gladness to all the world. The Sun of Righteousness does the same.

The little city of Nain stood near Mount Tabor, under the hill of Hermon, whose refreshing dews (celebrated by the sweet Psalmist of Israel) afforded less delight than those blessings of which they were significative—the doctrine and miracles of our Savior.

As our Lord approaches the city, accompanied by a great multitude of people as witnesses of his power and

mercy, he beholds the mournful procession of a funeral. A widow, attended by her weeping neighbors, is following her only son to the grave.

There was nothing in this spectacle which did not awaken compassion. He, whose unbounded pity devoted itself to the relief of all mankind, could not look on it without the tenderest emotions. Doubtless his own sacred eyes scarcely refrained from tears, while he enjoined the disconsolate mourner to cease from weeping. A youth, in the flower of his age, in the fulness of strength, and vigor, and beauty, torn away by the arm of death—what heart is so insensible as to be unmoved at such a spectacle?

But here was an aggravation of sorrow. It was the *only* son of his mother who was snatched to an untimely grave. No condition whatever can make it otherwise than grievous to a parent to sustain this severe visitation of God; reason justifies, religion permits, our tears. Yet surely it is some mitigation of sorrow, when we can turn our eyes to those *living* objects of affection whom it may please the Divine mercy to continue to our love. However we may lament our loss, we cannot but hope that it may be in some measure supplied by the survivors. But if all our joys and affections are centred in one,—when they must either live or die with an only child,—that stroke, if it take place, admits of no earthly consolation. When God would describe the most passionate expression of sorrow that can befall the miserable, the voice of inspiration thus addresses a wretched people: “O daughter of Jerusalem, gird thee with sackcloth, and roll thyself in ashes; make lamentation and bitter mourning, *as for thine only son!*” Such was the loss, such the sorrow of this agonized mother; neither words nor tears could suffice to do it justice.

Alas! had she been aided by the counsel and support of a husband, the burden had seemed less intolerable. Then might she have pou ed forth her anguish into a fond

and faithful bosom—she would not have borne the extremity of the conflict alone; there had been one to moderate the frenzy of grief or to enliven its torpid melancholy. But even this consolation is denied her; the widowed mourner looks forward to nothing on this side the grave but solitary wretchedness; all her hope, her happiness, her comfort, the stay of her life is gone.

And now, when she considers herself as desolate and forlorn, as a wretch past all capacity of redress or consolation, the God of all hope beholds, and pities, and relieves her. In the sight of all the people will he give a foretaste of that blessed day when he shall swallow up death in victory—when the Lord God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people.

Here was no solicitor but his own compassion: in other cases either the sufferer in person or some tender and sympathizing friend implored his mercy. The centurion besought him for a servant; the ruler for a son; Jairus for a daughter; a company of charitable friends and neighbors for the paralytic; now Christ himself seeks out the mourner, and offers his all-powerful and unrequested aid. The Father of mercies knoweth our frame; our sorrows are all in his sight, our afflictions are the most powerful suitors to his mercy. No tears, no lamentations can move him so much as his own Divine commiseration. O God, none of the distresses of thy children are hidden from thine eyes, none are absent from thine heart—they are in the book of remembrance before thee; and when we seem past all hope, all possibility of help, then art thou nearest to us for deliverance.

Concealment does not remedy but aggravate our wo. When the Son of God enjoins this sorrowing mother to refrain her voice from weeping, and her eyes from tears, he seems to her as demanding what humanity itself cannot comply with. Have words such efficacy as to dispel this justly-founded sorrow? To bid her not weep who had

lost her only son, was to persuade her to be miserable, and not to feel it—or else to withhold from her the sad privilege which nature hath given to affliction. But that she might know that the Son of Man had power even on earth to ransom us from the grave, he saith unto those lifeless remains, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!” The Lord of life and death speaks with authority; no finite being could have uttered this with success—without presumption. This is the voice which hereafter shall call our vanished bodies from those elements into which they may have been resolved, and shall raise them from their dust. The deep and wide sea shall give up her dead—all the fetters of our mighty enemy shall not detain our earthly tabernacles when God shall command them to be restored. Why doth incredulous nature shrink from the difficulty of a resurrection, and deem it impossible, when the God of nature undertakes it? It is as easy for the almighty word, which gave being unto all things, to say, “Let them be renewed,” as, “Let them be made!”

Our Savior speaks to the dead as if he were alive, and by that word restores him to life. Death has no power to detain that man whom God commands to “Arise.” Immediately he that was dead sat up. So, at the sound of the last trumpet, by the power of the same voice, we shall arise out of the dust, and stand up in glory—this corruptible shall put on incorruption—this mortal immortality. The body shall never perish—it shall be sown, that it may spring up with increase of blessedness. How desperate, how miserable would be our lying down, if it were not for this assurance of rising! And now, lest our weak faith should stagger at this great mystery, by the present he gives assurance of the future. The power which can raise one man, can raise a thousand—can raise a world: no power can raise *one*, but that which is infinite—and how shall that which is infinite admit of limitation? What state, what degree of dissolution shall hinder the efficacy

of this supreme command? The daughter of Jairus arises from her bed—the youth at Nain from his bier—Lazarus from his grave—the saints at Jerusalem from their dust. Turn ye to the strong-hold, ye prisoners of hope—He that hath the keys of death can without difficulty pervade even the inmost recesses of those abodes of darkness.

Behold the youth, miraculously awakened from his deadly sleep, opening those eyes which had been closed in night—descending from the bier—casting himself down in grateful transport, at the feet of his almighty Deliverer—adoring that Divine power which commanded back his soul to its forsaken mansion—uttering words of praise and wonder. Our Lord, who in this marvellous act had pitied the mother, and for her sake had raised the dead, delivers him into the hands of his enraptured parent. Who can paint the amazement and ecstasy of joy which diffused itself through the soul of that revived mourner when her son now salutes her, as from another world, imparting and receiving congratulation? How suddenly were all the tears of that mourning train exchanged into expressions of joyful astonishment! How soon is that funeral pomp turned into a birthday feast! What awful and admiring looks were cast upon that Lord of life, who in the midst of humility had approved his omnipotence! How gladly did every tongue celebrate both the work and the Author! “A great prophet is risen up among us, and God hath visited his people.” As yet they were not acquainted with God manifested in the flesh. This miracle might well have assured them that he whom they beheld was more than a prophet. Hereafter they shall be taught that the prophet who was now raised up to them was the God who now visited them; even that God who in the last day shall display the same power to them and all the world, which he had now displayed in their sight—should recall them also from death to life—should speak to every one of them, “I say unto thee, Arise!”

## 67.—THE RULER'S SON HEALED.

Already had Cana in Galilee received abundant demonstration of the power and goodness of God. There the Savior of mankind had manifested forth his glory, and confirmed the faith of his disciples by the first public evidence of his mission. Now, being returned to the same highly-favored spot, he makes it the scene of another stupendous miracle, different in its nature, but equally decisive with the former. Before he graced a humble marriage festival; now he sends comfort to the house of mourning, that he might teach us whither to have recourse in the hour of sorrow.

How doth the goodness and munificence of God transcend that of man, even of those who amongst mortals are most loudly celebrated for their charitable actions! His mercies are constant, progressive, infinite. He is not weary of well-doing; his blessings, whether we consider their number or their magnitude, are beyond our imagination to conceive. The coasts of Galilee already resounded with his praises, when behold! other and yet greater wonders call for new demonstrations of gratitude. Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God almighty; thou hast magnified thy name and thy word above all things.

Seldom do we find persons of exalted station attendant on our Lord; his companions, his friends, his disciples were all selected from among the poor and the lowly; but here one eminent in rank, abounding in all that life holds most desirable, is a petitioner for his dying son. Earthly greatness is no defence against afflictions. Disease and death make no exception in favor of the great; they tremble not when they assail the mighty. Why should any complain or murmur at that common lot, that one event, which happeneth unto all mankind?



The rumor of our Savior's return from Judea into Galilee soon reached the ears of the anxious father. Many seek to Christ in the day of their necessity, who in their prosperous fortunes were the followers of vanity, the slaves of ambition. Happy was it for this man that he was visited by the hand of God; he had not else been made acquainted with his Savior—his soul had continued in ignorance and unbelief. For what purpose does our heavenly Father send us pain, sorrow, disappointment, opposition, but that we may throw ourselves into his arms for comfort? Whither should we go in the day of adversity, but to that omnipotent Being, that Physician of souls, who healeth all our infirmities, that we may hereafter exclaim with joy, "It is good for us that we were afflicted?"

It was a day's journey from Capernaum to Cana in Galilee. Thence did the nobleman come to our blessed Lord, to entreat him that the fever might depart from his son. How prodigal are we of labor in our researches after bodily health! No way is long, no fatigue insupportable. Our souls, the best and dearest part of our existence, are oppressed by the malignant influence of unbelief and of self-love; we are aware of this, and yet we remain in careless insensibility and see them languish unto death.

This ruler was neither faithless nor believing. Had he been faithless, he would not so eagerly have sought after our Savior. Had he believed aright, he would not have formed so inadequate a judgment of the power of that Word which is every where present and efficacious. As if Christ could not have healed his child unless he stood by the bed of languishing—as if he could not have recalled him even from the arms of death—"Master, come down, ere my child die!"

How different was the Roman centurion from this Jewish ruler! The one came for his servant, the other for his son. The son is above the servant, but the faith which made intercession for the latter far excelled that which

approached our Lord in behalf of the former. The one exclaims, "Lord, come not under my roof, for I am not worthy—but speak the word, and my servant shall be healed"—the other insinuates, "Come under my roof, or my son cannot be made whole." Shall not he then prescribe to us in what manner he will impart his favors? Shall we presumptuously limit him to one certain system of conferring blessings on us? How shall the all-wise God endure to be dictated to by his creature? "Give us that which is needful for our souls and bodies" is a wise and lawful prayer—but "Give us happiness by means of wealth, or honor, or prosperity," is an unwarrantable intrusion on God. In spiritual things, he has acquainted us with the means whereby he will work, even his own word and ordinances—upon these, because they have his promise, we may confidently seek a blessing. In matters of a temporal nature we must commit our way unto the Lord, and resign ourselves to his all-wise dispensations. It is for us to receive, and not to appoint.

He who came to seek relief for his son's sickness, hears of his own—"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe!" This nobleman was of Capernaum—there had Christ often preached—there was one of his chief places of residence. This man therefore had often heard the *doctrines* of our Savior, unless he absented himself through prejudice and infidelity—and the *miracles* of Jesus could not be unknown to him, at least on the attestation of others—yet, in his application to Christ, he seeks the advantage of human skill and wisdom, not the plenitude of almighty power. Incredulity was the prevailing error among the Jews—it was a gloom which no ordinary light could dispel—they demanded wonders and portentous tokens from heaven. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." Had they not been wilfully obdurate, they had already sufficient proof of the Messiah, even of the kind they sought for. The circum-

stances attending on his own birth, and that of his fore-runner, the star, the journey of the sages, the voice of God at his baptism, what were these but signs and wonders? Yet their stubborn hearts will not accede to the truth, unless each individual see with his own eyes the wonderful works of God. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!

The charge is awful and alarming—"Ye will not believe!" Without faith there is no true repentance—without repentance, how shall we look for pardon? The benefits which had been offered to this dignified inhabitant of Capernaum had not yet taught him to work the works of God. Alas, the greater our light, the more culpable is our unbelief. What shall be our sentence if we stumble, in the clearest sunshine that ever beamed from heaven on any church or nation? Be merciful to our sins, O Lord—take away from us all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word. Keep it ever imprinted on the souls of thy people, that, without faith, it is impossible to please thee!

Still, the mind of this anxious parent is fastened on his son. Our Savior tells him of his unbelief—he repeats his importunate petition—he complains of sorrow—as yet he is not awakened to a sense of duty. O the meekness and tender mercy of our blessed Lord! He implants in our hearts the fond affections of nature—he allows of their fervor—he pities, instead of condemning, their excess—"Go thy way—thy son liveth." What a word is this from those gracious lips which even now had accused this suppliant of unbelief! Who would not have expected that some punishment would have fallen on the offender? that he would have departed in grief and disappointment unheard, and unanswered? O Lord, if we measure our hopes by our own unworthiness we can have no expectation of blessings—if we regard thy bounty and compassion, we can have no doubt of prevailing. How

gently dost thou deal with our perverseness! The cries and petulance of the wayward infant serve but to excite the anger of strangers—the mother clasps him to her bosom.

Yet while our Lord condescends to grant the petition of a doubting father, he refuses to go under his roof. For the trial and confirmation of his faith, he bids him depart, but assures him of the recovery of his child. Outward things carry no respect with God. The image of his Divine majesty shining inwardly on the soul, obtains his favor, whatever be our state. The centurion's piety could do more than the ruler's greatness—and the faithful man's servant was more regarded than the rich man's son.

The ruler's request was, "Come and heal"—our Lord returns for answer, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." The mercy of God meets those in the end, whom he has tried by previous correction—graciously interprets our prayers—gives us what we desire at his own time, and in the manner which seemeth good in his sight. Justly doth he forbear to go down with this ruler, lest he should confirm him in the opinion that his power was merely local—but he performs that miracle in absence, for which his presence was required, and gives a greater demonstration of his omnipotence than his petitioner had asked. How often is he deaf to our will, that he may listen to our advantage! The holy Paul would be free from temptation—he hears of a fresh supply of grace: the sick man prays for recovery, and hears of patience—for life, and is received to glory.

The fever of the child, and the infidelity of the parent are vanished. Had not the nobleman gone home satisfied with the intimation of his son's life and recovery, how could he have expected any mercy or favor at the hands of God? Now the news that the Divine promise is performed meets him on the way—and he who believed in part when he left Capernaum, and yet more as he return-

ed thither, now advances to higher degrees of faith, and diffuses it throughout the whole compass of his family. He who boasts of a full stature in the first moment of assent, may presume, but does not believe.

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### 68.—MATTHEW CALLED.

Where is the boast of prejudice and superstition, when we see Matthew the publican called to be an apostle of Christ? Who shall prescribe to the Author of our salvation, or point out to him the proper instruments of his glory? The other disciples, whose calling is recorded, were poor and humble fishermen: Matthew is taken from the receipt of custom to be both an apostle and evangelist. They were unlettered; he by his very profession stigmatized as base and infamous. The condition was not in itself sinful; but while the taxes which the Romans imposed on God's free people were odious, the collectors of them were held in abomination, as persons devoted to oppression, cruelty and tyrannous exactions. Yet, behold, a publican called, from the actual discharge of his hated office, to be of the household and family of Christ. Jesus, as he passed by, said unto him, "Follow me." He discovered a disciple and a preacher of the truth in the very temple of avarice and extortion. Nothing can be hidden from his piercing eye, nothing can escape his all-powerful knowledge—he is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Blessed Lord, thou canst behold true piety and the love of virtue in the most abject situation; thou canst detect hypocrisy, and pride, and all uncharitableness, though glittering in the sunshine of prosperity.

The real penitent is ever ready to accuse himself, and

seeks not to disguise or palliate his offences. How do we hear the shame of our apostle recorded, but by his own mouth? Matthew the Evangelist speaks of *Matthew the publican*—the other historians of the Gospel distinguish him by the name of *Levi*—he publishes the disgrace annexed to his past calling, in grateful remembrance of the mercy which had delivered him. When we humble ourselves in the sight of God, then is he ready to exalt and lift us up.

That voice, which spake to the astonished publican, "Follow me," was the same all-powerful word which once said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. The omnipotent Savior, by the influence of his grace, attracts the heart of his servant—"he arose, and followed him." We are all by nature averse from thee, O God—lo, thou speakest, and we, instead of following thee, like this thy servant, remain in willing subjection to a sinful and miserable world. Yet cast us not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from us. The heavenly voice may not always address us in vain—a time may come when we shall hear it speaking effectually to our hearts—then shall we also arise and follow thee.

How does the regenerate soul account the riches of this world as dross, in comparison with that better treasure, which fadeth not away, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus! The called apostle at once abandons his profession (however lucrative) and follows his Redeemer in contented poverty. He foresaw, in that happy and honorable attendance, a more excellent, more enduring substance, which had great recompense of reward. If we hold any earthly possession so dear that we refuse to part with it for Christ, we are more fit for publicans than disciples.

The blessed Jesus calls Matthew to be a disciple. Matthew presumes to invite his Lord to a feast. The plea-

sure of his designation to a better office causes him, ere he abdicate the world, to celebrate, as a festival, the day of his entrance on a new and spiritual life. Here was cheerful gratitude rewarded by Divine condescension. The new servant bids his Master, the penitent, his Savior—and is honored by his gracious presence. Not for thine own sake, O blessed Lord, didst thou, on this and other occasions, vouchsafe to hold converse with thy creatures in the hour of their joy. Thy meat and drink was to do the will of thine eternal Father—in pursuit of thy work of mercy, thou wert ready to afford the benefit of thy conversation to the humble publican as well as the superstitious Pharisee. When thou wert with sinners, thou didst convert them—when with converts, thou didst instruct and confirm them—when with the poor, thou didst feed them—when with the rich, thou didst impart more precious gifts than all the treasures of this world could bestow. Whither didst thou go, and not leave a blessing behind thee? The bridegroom at Cana beholds the water miraculously converted into wine—Simon the Pharisee hath his table honored by the public forgiveness of a sinner, and the heavenly doctrine of the remission of sins. Salvation came to the house of Zaccheus with thee its Author; thy presence made the chief of the publicans a son of Abraham—Matthew, already a disciple, is numbered with the holy apostles—Martha and Mary entertain him, and besides Divine instruction, receive their brother from the dead. O Savior, thou takest up thine abode in our hearts—thou dost receive us to thy spiritual banquet—in both is honor and blessedness.

The public contempt had taught these receivers of custom the lesson of unanimity—and led them to seek mutual comfort in that society which others held loathsome and contagious. At the table of his new convert our Lord beholds an assemblage of publicans and sinners—meeting together in the hope of that mercy which their

associate had found—or perhaps invited by the disciple to be partakers of the plenteous grace which had been liberally afforded to himself. O merciful Lord, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, what sinner can fear to kneel before thee, when he beholds thy gracious condescension? Who can fear to be despised by thy merciful benignity, which did not disdain to hold converse, even with the vilest of mankind? Thou didst vouchsafe to cast an eye of pity on the malefactor expiring on his cross, on the sinner weeping at thy feet, on the Canaanite crying to thee by the way, on the blushing and contrite adulteress, on the perjured disciple, on the furious persecutor of thy Church, nay, on thine own executioners and murderers. How can we be unwelcome guests at thy table, if we come with hearty repentance, with steadfast faith in thy mercy, and full purpose of amendment in our hearts and lives? “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*.”

The envious Pharisees misinterpreted all the actions of our Lord. Where they should have admired his goodness, they charge him, in the presence of his disciples, with impiety—“Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?” They durst not address our blessed Savior himself, whose answer would at once have convicted their malice; but they level their assaults where they will be most likely to do extensive mischief. We cannot reverence that man whom we think impious. Christ had lost the hearts of his followers, if they could for a moment have listened to these malevolent insinuations—“Can he be worthy of the name of a prophet, who is profane? Can he be otherwise than profane, who eateth with publicans and sinners?” Proud and senseless Pharisees, ye fast in your houses, while Christ eats with sinners—but if ye fast from pride, while he eats in humility; if ye fast for applause or popularity, while he, at his



repast, seeks the edification and conversion of offenders ; your fast is unclean—his feast is holy—ye shall have your portion with hypocrites, when he shall come in glory, and call those souls to joy which have been purified by repentance.

When these wicked censurers thought the disciples had offended, they spake, not to them, but to their master—“ Why do thy disciples that which is not lawful ?” Now, when they judge our Lord to have transgressed, they speak, not to himself, but to his followers. They leave no expedient untried to bring dissension into the family of Christ, and to check the progress of the Gospel. Meanwhile the omnipotence of our Savior hath discerned the thoughts and intents of the hearts, and his voice answers concerning himself—“ They that be whole have no need of a physician ; but they that are sick.” The insolent Pharisees over-rated their own holiness, and passed ready condemnation on the lives of others—as if themselves were untainted by secret sins—as if others were incapable of pardon. The Almighty beholds arrogance, and finds the judges worthy of punishment, the accused not unworthy of remission. The sickness of these sinners is less desperate than the health of their haughty censurers. Every soul is sick ; those most, who feel it not. They who feel it, complain—they who complain, are healed. The wretch, who is on the verge of eternity, is insensible of pain, because the killing mortification is actually begun.

O blessed Physician, by whose stripes we are healed—by whose death we live—happy are they who betake themselves unto thee. With thee is the fulness of wisdom, and power, and mercy—make thou us sensible of our sins ; we are then as safe as thou art gracious. “ Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord God, our Holy One ? We shall not die, O Lord—for we are thine, thou lover of souls !”

## 69.—THE GADARENES.

While the unwearied mercy of God provides incessantly for our good, the powers of darkness are indefatigable in their attempts to do us evil. Their malice, were it not controlled by God, would give us not a moment's intermission—the world would be full of nothing but sin, and sorrow, and torment. But blessed be the Lord, whose omnipotence hath limited and restrained the power of our enemies—blessed be our strong Helper, who hath not given us over for a prey unto their teeth. They are mighty, and rage horribly; but yet the Lord, who dwelleth on high, is mightier.

“When our blessed Savior had passed over the lake, immediately there met him out of the tomb a man with an unclean spirit.”

The fetters wherewith this wretch had been bound by the charity of his friends, were no sooner fastened on him than they were broken—he escapes into the wilderness, carried thither by the resistless impulse of roaring insanity, transported by his tyrannous inmate to a place of gloomy desolation, that he might be out of the capacity of all relief and comfort.

There is no misery incident to human nature which is not known and pitied by our gracious Redeemer. Without entreaty, either from the miserable sufferer himself, or even from any charitable friend, the God of spirits takes pity on his distress, and commands the malicious adversary to depart from him. O mercy, that anticipates our requests, that exceeds our thoughts, that forces benefits on our state of helplessness, that does for us more than we ask or feel our need of! If men, upon our earnest entreaty, afford their aid, we praise and admire their bounty—but thou, O God of all goodness, art more ready to hear, than thy creatures to pray unto thee.

And is thy loving-kindness impaired by thy glory? If thou wert thus compassionate upon earth, art thou not equally so in heaven? How dost thou, at this moment, behold with the tenderest pity all our sorrows, all our infirmities! How does thy grace, in the midst of our severest afflictions, give us a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it! What evil can befall us, which thou dost not behold from thy heaven, and feel, and relieve?

The poor demoniac is compelled to give utterance to the horrors wherewith the presence of Jesus affected the malignant spirit—"I beseech thee, torment me not." Guilt would fain escape out of sight—never is it so appalled and confounded as when it beholds the radiant face of innocence. Satan had learnt by experience how fruitless it was to enter the lists against the Son of God—he stood before our Lord with that grief and consternation which will hereafter overwhelm his wretched votaries, when they shall say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" That proud spirit, which had once presumptuously demanded adoration from the Messiah, now casts himself down at his feet with servile and abject gestures of submission. Who shall value himself on the mere external homage of lifeless superstition or hypocrisy, when he sees Satan himself fall down and worship? In the outward demeanor is the *body* of devotion—in the disposition of the mind, the *soul* of it. True religion unites these in the homage which the christian pays to God—how different is that homage from the counterfeit prostrations of evil men and evil spirits! The sincere believer serves the Lord in fear and rejoices in trembling. He adores that heavenly Master, in whose supremacy is his comfort and protection. His duty is the duty of a son, not that of a slave. It is fear enlivened with joy, and joy attempered by fear—whereas the service of devils, and their ministers on earth, is only an act of form or of constraint, as to their

Judge—as to their tormentor—not as to their Lord : in mere hypocrisy, not in reverence—in gloomy melancholy, without all delight—in a perfect horror, without capacity of joy.

But in what terms do we hear the confession of the apostate spirit ? “ I beseech thee, O Jesus, Son of the most high God ! ” A confession, which (if we knew not its author) we should attribute to some faithful convert, or some adoring saint ! That name, which was announced by angels, is invoked by devils. That great and awful name, at the recital of which “ every knee shall bow, in heaven, in earth, and *under the earth*,” is called on with eager importunity by this prostrate adversary. He believes and trembles ; and what he believes he confesses. It was reserved for infidels to deny what hell itself is not presumptuous enough to question. Yet how little can mere speculation avail us in matters that concern our souls ? If charity edifies not, knowledge only serves to allure us to our destruction. If there be not a sense of our interest in this Savior, if we have not grace and disposition of mind to apply to ourselves his merits, and reap the benefit of his atonement, we attain no ease, no comfort ; we are neither safer nor better ; we are only so far enlightened as to understand who shall be our Judge.

It is for none but God to hold converse with Satan. He, who might touch the leprosy without legal uncleanness, because he touched to heal, might safely speak to that enemy whom he sought to overcome. Our infirmity cannot do this without sin, because we cannot do it without danger. Be it our care to fly from this unequal conflict—and if the spirit of disobedience endeavor at a conference with us by his secret temptations, let us, with the Archangel, (see Zech. 3 : 2, Jude, 5 : 9,) at once commit ourselves to Jehovah for our defence ; let us, with the royal prophet, exclaim—“ Depart from me, ye wicked—I will keep the commandments of God.”

What a combination is there among the powers of darkness! What wonder is it, that wicked men conspire in evil, that there is such unanimity among the enemies of Christ, when devils themselves are *one*, in act, in title, in habitation? "My name is Legion—for we are many." Alas, how doth it behove the servants of God to unite themselves together in a communion of saints? If armed troops assault a single warrior, what hope has he of life or victory? All our forces are necessary to make head against this league of destruction. Our enemies come upon us like a torrent—O let us not be separate, like drops which fall into the dust!

How fearful is the consideration of the multitude of apostate angels! If a legion can attend one man, how many are they who are dispersed over the world for the punishment of the wicked, the benefit of God's children, the trial of both! There is no place, no time, wherein we may be secure from the onsets of these enemies. The wicked shall not want furtherance to evil, the good shall not want combatants in their christian warfare. Awaken your courage, stir up your hearts, make sure the means of your safety, ye servants of Christ. Yet are there more and mightier with us, than against us. The God of heaven is with us, if we are with him—and our guardian angels behold the face of God. If every malignant spirit were a legion, we are secure in his omnipotence. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil—he shall stretch forth his hand against the furiousness of our enemies, and his right hand shall save us.

The malice of these powers of darkness extends itself over the whole creation. When the almighty word of our blessed Savior commanded the evil spirits to depart from the present object of their cruelty, they sought permission to enter into a herd of swine, then feeding near the mountains. If they may not vex the body of man,

they will destroy his possessions. Any way, every way, they seek our misery. But if it be fearful to think how great things evil spirits can do with permission, how are we revived by the thought, that they can do nothing *without* permission! Their enmity would destroy the whole world—more especially, mankind—most of all, christians—yet if without authority from God they cannot assault even a senseless beast, what can they do to the living images of their Creator? They are not able to suggest one thought to our hearts, but under the permission of our Savior. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He sends us to the contest, that we may reap the glories of the victory. Having shed his own most precious blood to save us from evil, he will not give us over into the power of our enemies—when we sit in darkness the Lord will be a light unto us.

No sooner are the spirits departed from the man than they enter into the swine—and suddenly, with impetuous speed, the whole herd run violently into the sea, and perish in the waters. And was this not written for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this was written. Why will not our zeal to do good keep pace with the activity of others to do evil?

The Gadarenes hear all that has been done, and, instead of expressing joy or gratitude at the act of heavenly power and mercy which had restored their miserable neighbor, they make supplication with one voice to Jesus, that he would depart out of their coasts. What miserable and pernicious misconstructions do men make of the Divine attributes and actions? With what ingenious sophistry do they deceive their own souls, that they may rob themselves of God? “He is omniscient—why should I pray? He is provident—why may not I be careless? He is merciful—why should I not offend? Foolish men say unto the Almighty, “Depart from us—for we desire

not the knowledge of thy ways." O Savior, how worthy are they to be deprived of thy presence who solicit thy departure! Thou hast just cause to be weary of us, even when we seek thy face—but when our wretched unthankfulness grows weary of *thee*, who can wonder that we are abandoned to ourselves? Yet leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation—even thy chastisements are mercies, when compared with the horror of rejection—even thine anger is less insupportable than thine absence!

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#### 70.—THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

Not only the palaces of the great, but the cottages of the poor, are gilded by the radiance of the sunbeam. The miracles of our blessed Savior, during his ministry on earth, were not confined within the limits of his peculiar people—that perfect light shone upon all—none were excluded. Though his mission principally regarded Judea, as far as related to his personal residence, he would sometimes extend the influence of his power and mercy to the Gentile world. Departing into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he finds a woman of Canaan oppressed with intolerable anguish, and stretches forth his hand for her relief.

It was long since the name or nation of Canaanites had been mentioned in the world. All the country of Palestine had been once so styled, but the people were now in a manner forgotten. Yet this woman, as descended from those Phœnicians who were anciently expelled out of Canaan, is called by the name of her parent-nation. God would magnify his own mercy, and shame the ingratitude of his rebellious people—a faithful Canaanite is a suppli-

ant to Christ, while the Jews despised and neglected so great salvation.

The unhappy mother did not speak without the most vehement expressions of sorrow. Affection raised her voice to an importunate clamor. The God of mercy delights in these impassioned solicitations of penitence and faith. Words and not prayers go forth out of careless and feigned lips. If we feel our wants, we shall express them in the animated language of real suppliants. If we would prevail with God, we must address ourselves to the throne of grace with all the fervor of our souls.

In her application to our Savior for his pity and assistance, we find an abstract of that faith which it is the christian's duty to keep inviolate, as the foundation of his dearest hope. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David!" What proselyte, what disciple could have said more? What does she confess, but the divine and human nature united in the one Messiah—his divinity, as Lord—his humanity as the Son—both, as the Son of David? To Abraham was promised a blessing on his posterity—to David perpetual dominion. The woman of Canaan, in addressing our Lord by this title, proclaims him the everlasting King of his church, the Rod which should proceed from the stem of Jesse, the true and only Savior of the world. He who thus approaches Christ, approaches him not in vain. "God hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true—and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Being thus acknowledged, he is entreated to show mercy. The *daughter* of the suppliant, not herself, was tormented—but she says, "Have mercy on *me*." Perhaps the child was senseless of misery—the parent feels a double portion of sorrow. It was this affliction which sent her to Christ. We cannot have a better advocate than our own calamity: unassisted, it sues, and pleads,



and importunes for us with God. That which too often disgusts and discourages men, whose compassion is finite, attracts him to us, whose loving-kindness endureth for ever and ever. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted, in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

But neither the strength of our faith, nor the sincerity of our obedience, can secure us against bodily and temporal affliction. All Israel could not afford a parallel to the zeal and devotion of this Canaanite—yet was she tormented in her daughter. Against inward and spiritual diseases religion affords us an unfailing antidote—other chastisements, though grievous in appearance, may be salutary in the event. Our heavenly Father makes use of various means to promote one important end—the eternal salvation of mankind. When the messenger of Satan buffets us, it is enough that God hath said, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

To the prayer of faith and humility offered at the feet of the Savior of mankind, what might have been expected but an immediate and satisfactory reply? Yet, behold, "he answered her not a word." Whence, O Lord, was this unaccustomed silence? An unhappy mourner implores thy mercy—thou, the God of mercy, art speechless. Couldst thou do otherwise than pity, and regard her? She could never have said, "O Lord, thou Son of David," but from thee—No man calleth Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. But it seemed good to thy Divine wisdom to make trial of the patience of this thy servant—and while her fervent prayers were no less welcome to thee than the adoration of angels, thou wouldst seem as if thou didst not hear, or at least regard them. When we have sent up our petitions to the throne of mercy, happy are we, if we receive an *immediate* answer of peace—but if the blessing is sometimes delayed, let us

not therefore abandon ourselves to despair—let us not imagine that our prayer is ineffectual, or that God is deaf to our entreaties. A faithful suitor in the present instance addresses a gracious Savior—and yet he answers her not a word. If we are poor in Spirit, God is rich in mercy—he cannot, he will not send us away empty—but he will teach us the lesson of dutious perseverance; and oppose our will, that he may advance our benefit.

In consequence of our blessed Lord's silence, his disciples are moved to pray for this afflicted parent. They approach their Master, not requesting her dismissal—that had been no favor, but a grievous punishment. If to be held in suspense be miserable, to be sent away with a repulse is aggravation of sorrow. They rather implore him to extend his wonted mercy, and to grant her the desire of her heart. They saw her grief—they were acquainted with its cause—they admired her faith and constancy, and became suitors for her, unrequested. It is our duty, in all cases of necessity, to intercede for each other with God—to approach him with earnest supplications for the relief of the distressed. We are commanded to say, "Our Father" (not *my* Father) "which art in heaven!" That man cannot pray, or be heard for himself, who offers not his petition for others. No prayer hath efficacy without faith—no faith without charity.

Christ, who spake not to the woman, answers his disciples—but who shall decide, whether the silence or the reply were most grievous? "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." What is this but a defence of his apparent neglect?—a proof that it was by no means casual, but purposely designed? While he remained silent he might have been supposed to be occupied with higher thoughts—now his answer tends to drive away even the shadow of hope. Like a faithful ambassador, he has regard to his commission. He who in the mysterious conflict with the patriarch (see Gen.

32 : 24-32,) had changed his name and dismissed him with a blessing, will not forget his old loving-kindness to the house of Israel. Till their Divine Shepherd came down from heaven, the sheep of his pasture (a prey to tyranny and superstition) had neither food nor protection—they wandered, and were lost. O blessed Savior, we see thy charge—thou art sent to the humble and contrite heart, not to those who are securely fenced in their own vain confidence—thou art sent to sheep—to sheep that are lost. He is not a Jew who is one outwardly. Every Israelite is not a true one. Thou wilt not bring us back to thy fold, if we be not lost in our own apprehension. O make us so sensible of our own wanderings, that we may know, and feel, and rejoice in that mercy which recalls us unto thee!

And will not the wretched mother now desist from her importunity? Will neither the silence of Christ nor his denial put an end to her entreaties? Could she have one glimpse of hope after a repulse like this? Still, as if she saw no cause of discouragement, she comes, and worships, and cries, "Lord, help me!" No refusal, no contempt can cast her off. True faith is steadfast and unmoveable. The woman of Canaan approached our Lord, not to murmur, but to expostulate—to pray—to prostrate herself at his feet. She saw that divinity in our blessed Savior which bowed her to the earth—before, she had confessed him with her mouth; now, she bends the knee before him. There cannot be a fitter posture for mortals in their supplications to God.

Still the constancy of this servant of Christ must endure a fiercer flame. "It is not good to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs." How different are the ways of heaven from those of men! Even this severity argues favor. O Lord, the trial had not been so sharp if thou hadst not found the faith of thy suppliant strong, and designed her a happy issue to her sufferings.

Behold the triumph of pious humility! "*Truth, Lord—yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.* Thou art truth itself, and thy words are the words of truth. Yet however despicable my condition, admit me to this favor and privilege, that I may partake, at an humble distance, of that mercy which thou dost bestow so liberally on thy children. The blessing I require, though great to me, is as nothing to thine infinite power and goodness. I presume not to press to thy board—give me this boon, and I shall retire with transports of gratitude."

Never was such zeal and piety unrewarded. "O woman, great is thy faith—be it unto thee even as thou wilt—and her daughter was healed in the self-same hour."

We cannot be more precious in the sight of God than when we humble our souls before him. Nothing is obtained by vain ostentation—nothing is lost by lowly self-abasement. O God, when, from the consideration of thine holiness, thy purity, thine omnipotence, we turn our eyes to our own vileness and imperfections, how shall we express our shame and confusion! O let us acknowledge our infirmities to thee, who canst pity, forgive, redress them—so setting ourselves down on the lowest seat at thy table, that thou, the great Master of the feast, mayest in thine own good time advance us to the height of glory. Amen.

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### 71.—ZACCHEUS.

Our blessed Savior "went about doing good"—wisdom, truth and mercy were ever his companions. If the duties of his sacred office call him from place to place, in

nis progress he will diffuse the knowledge and faith of God, and afford comfort, instruction, deliverance to mankind. The good Shepherd, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, is unwearied in his endeavors to bring back the wanderers into the fold. In his way from Galilee to Jerusalem, he betows the light of his heavenly doctrine on the inhabitants of Jericho, and brings salvation to the house of the humble Zaccheus.

The conversion of a sinner cannot fail of affording joy and exultation to every faithful heart. To see men perverted from God to the world, from truth to error, from piety to irreligion, is both common and lamentable—but the return of the penitent to the path of life, the adoption of a wretched transgressor into the glorious inheritance of the children of God, is a subject of delight even to the blessed angels.

The name of publican was in itself a term of abhorrence. So highly did the Jews regard their freedom, that every impeachment of it seemed an unpardonable crime. They questioned not merely the expediency, but even the *legality* of paying tribute to the Roman emperors. Matthew, 22 : 17. To a people so impatient of the yoke, any office of exaction must of necessity be grievous—more particularly where the avarice and extortion of the officers appointed for that purpose rendered the impost of Cæsar doubly odious. Even wealth itself, thus acquired, failed of procuring a publican the respect and affection of his countrymen. They considered the office as an exclusion from the privileges of the sons of Jacob—they who filled it were ranked with heathens, with the vilest of sinners, with strangers from the covenant of promise. Yet from this perilous and unhallowed traffic Matthew is called to be an apostle and evangelist, and Zaccheus, the chief of the publicans, to be an eminent disciple of our Lord.

When the fame of Christ diffused itself throughout the

city of Jericho, Zaccheus was earnestly desirous to behold the mighty Prophet. Curiosity, rather than faith, at first led him to this interview. The rumor of those astonishing miracles which exalted our Savior above mankind induced this publican to seek his presence—and the mercy of God gave occasion to the belief, and conversation of a penitent.

And can we wonder at the eagerness wherewith Zaccheus surmounted all difficulties, that he might attain the object of his wishes? What glorious scene could the world exhibit comparable with the sight of the Messiah? The aged Simeon wished this spectacle to close his eyes, as if he deemed it no less than disparagement to look on ought after it; and prayed to depart in peace, having seen the salvation of God. The father of the faithful, at the distance of almost two thousand years, saw his day, and was glad. The great Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of this as his most signal distinction—"Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" Blessed Savior, if to behold thee on earth is the subject of exultation, what shall be their joy who shall not only be admitted to see, but to partake of thy glory in heaven? Even now, though the eye of faith be dim, yet it is sure. O Lord, teach us to covet earnestly the best gifts—teach us to aspire after those regions of bliss where we shall see thee as we are seen—where we shall know thee as we ourselves are known.

The streets of Jericho are thronged by the assembled multitude—here were many beholders, but few disciples. If gazing, if profession, were godliness, how many would be numbered among the children of God! But vainly do we boast of our forwardness to see and hear the Savior of mankind, if we receive him not into our hearts with sincerity and truth. "If a man love me, he will keep my words—and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

The crowd hides Christ from Zaccheus. Alas, how common a thing is it, by the interposition of the world, to be kept from the sight of our Lord! In vain shall we hope for the blessed vision of God, if we follow a multitude to do evil. Let us escape from all surrounding obstacles, all tumultuous cares, and press forward with ardent expectation towards the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Zaccheus, disappointed of the object of his wishes, climbs up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus. O Savior, how adorable is thy mercy towards the contrite and humble spirit! Who ever sought thee with a faithful heart, and was disappointed? The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous—and righteousness is by his mercy imputed to the penitent. How was Zaccheus astonished to hear himself called by name, addressed with kindness and familiarity by the Redeemer of mankind! He who telleth the number of the stars—He who (addressing his chosen people) saith, “I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine,” can speak peace and comfort to this descendant of Abraham, however the pride of superstitious bigotry might hold him in derision. “Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide in thine house.” O Savior, what dost thou every day to thy servants, but invite thyself to them in thy word and ordinances. Who are we, O God, that we should entertain thee, or that thou shouldst vouchsafe to bless us with thy presence? Thy condescension and mercy are exalted even by our unworthiness. Though we are sinners, thy voice speaketh unto us as unto children. Lord, we love thee because thou hast first loved us!

Can we wonder that Zaccheus descended with haste? that he welcomed the Messiah with grateful joy? that he celebrated as a festival the coming of his sacred guest? Had we been in his stead, how would our hearts have exulted at the presence of our Savior! How should we have

recorded the incomparable happiness of that day in which the Lord of heaven was an inmate under our roof! Even now, in a spiritual sense, we can receive him into our hearts; we can prepare him an habitation for himself—unworthy indeed, but such as he will not despise nor reject: there let us implore him to take up his abode till he calls us in return to those blissful habitations, the dwelling-place of his holiness and glory, to remain with him, not for any limited season, but through the countless ages of eternity.

While the publican was thus filled with joy, discontent rankled in the hearts of the Pharisees. Pride, envy, superstition, ignorance, combined to awaken this tumult in their souls. Their eye was evil, because Christ was good. Though none of them contested with Zaccheus the distinguished honor of welcoming our Lord to the offices of hospitality, they murmur at this unworthy host. They deem the privilege which themselves neglected too great for a sinner—the very mercy and condescension of our Lord is to them an aggravation of torment.

It is true, the sins of Zaccheus had been notorious—theirs, shrouded under a veil of secrecy. The idea of that secrecy leads them to insult one whose transgressions were written on his forehead. It is no less unjust than dangerous, to look at the offences of others with scorn, at the moment when we should behold our own with sorrow and humiliation.

Thus they stumbled and fell—but Zaccheus arose. All their malignant insinuations could neither diminish his joy nor abate the ardor of his piety. Never was our Savior better welcomed. The penitent publican, from this auspicious moment, renounces all violence and extortion. Justice and liberality are the handmaids of faith. Gifts shall be bestowed on the needy—restitution shall be made to the injured. “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor—and if I have taken any



thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold." The true repentance of this holy convert expresses itself in confession of sin, in atonement for past offences. This confession is full, liberal, open—he scruples not to give shame to himself, that he may ascribe glory to God. Wo be to that fatal bashfulness which terminates in confusion of face! Happy are they who humble themselves while the day of salvation lasteth—so shall they not be confounded in the hour of solemn retribution, when the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.

O blessed and bounteous recompense! "This day is salvation come to this house." That which thou bestowest on the poor, O true believer, is little in comparison with what thy Savior bestows on thee. Didst thou dispense all the riches of the world, it were nothing when put in the balance with that which thou receivest. It is but dross which thou dost give—thou art rewarded with salvation. Even now do thy faith and charity obtain for thee the assurance of thy future reward—even now do the everlasting gates of glory fly open to thy view. Thou hast dispersed abroad, thou hast given to the poor—thy righteousness remaineth for ever—thine horn shall be exalted with honor. Thou providest thyself bags that wax not old—a treasure in heaven that faileth not—where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. The mercy of thy Savior calls thee to a kingdom incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for the redeemed of God.

## 72.—HERODIAS.

The forerunner of Christ, rigid and austere in his manners, was ill fitted for the refinements of a court. A preacher of repentance could not hope for permanent favor where the most enormous crimes were practised with unblushing audacity—where tyranny, usurpation, and incest bade defiance to public and private virtue. Yet the invitation of Herod had drawn him thither; and his sanctity and integrity for a while maintained in that cruel heart a degree of respect and veneration for his character. “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and a holy; and he heard him gladly.” But when the prophet began to call him to account for his adulterous alliance—when the faithful messenger of Heaven (in the true spirit of his great predecessor) feared not the face of man, while he denounced the judgments of God, then was he to experience all the resentment of indignant malice. Another Ahab, at the instigation of Jezebel, thirsts after the blood of this Elijah.

The reformer will meet with little success in his designs, whose zeal is not seconded by fortitude. The apprehension of danger, the frown of power, will alter his sentiments—he will turn with every blast of fashion or interest—a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. Not so the Baptist. “What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?” No—a column firm and immoveable, against which the winds might blow, and the waves beat vehemently in vain—one who, being come to serve the Lord, had prepared his heart for temptation—one who had fixed his principles, and considered well before he entered upon action—one whom neither promises nor threatenings could induce to recede from duty, through hope of temporal good, or fear of temporal evil.

The first act of Herod's cruelty towards the Baptist was heinous. He was guilty of various enormities, but he "added this above all, that he shut up John in prison." The violence offered to the ambassador of God was an act of open hostility against the Majesty of heaven. The tyrant well knew the reputation of this saint of God—he could not but see how odious it would be to persecute the preacher for that just reproof which his crimes had too well deserved. But the subject of Herodias was a tender point, on which the tetrarch was not disposed to hear the law, because he was not disposed to do it. He was determined to persevere in what was wrong—and his once-loved monitor soon became insupportable. O servant of the Highest, who would not rather share thy prison than glitter in all the magnificence of the throne of Herod? Who can behold thee without admiration, sequestered once more from the world, and meditating on that blissful place and happy society to which thou art hastening?

Herod had thrown John into prison—but this would not satisfy Herodias. Still she seemed to hear that awful voice reproaching her for her crimes, and proclaiming the indignation of heaven. Nothing but the blood of the prophet could appease her fears, or disarm her resentment. She had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him—but for a while she could not. The partner of her crimes is easily won over to her purpose. Were it not for fear of the people, John should soon be murdered—but the policy of Herod as yet prevails over his malice. The reputation of the Baptist was such as to awaken all his fears. The tyrant was not unacquainted with the temper and disposition of the Jews; who, notwithstanding their natural depravity, could not but honor that exalted virtue which feared not the face of man when called upon to assert the glory of God.

What a conflict is in the bosom of a sinner, even when

meditating crimes as yet not perpetrated! On one side he is urged by his evil inclinations, and the suggestions of the tempter—on the other he is alarmed by the stings of conscience, by remorse and horror. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Herod fears the people—he regards not the Almighty. What could an offended people effect, in comparison with the just displeasure of heaven? They might have recourse to arms—stir up mutinies and tumults—disturb, perhaps overturn the government. Be it so. The wrath of God can arm the universal world against the sinner, can make every creature a weapon for the extirpation of his enemies. The day of the Lord is great and very terrible, and who shall abide it? O wretched Herod, who fearest temporal disgrace and danger, but wast not dismayed with the apprehensions of eternal torment!

The malice of Herodias is still on the watch. She is determined, sooner or later, to effect her revengeful purpose. As if sin could not be committed with impunity while the Baptist was living to hear it—as if his blood would not cry louder than his voice, and reprove this unhallowed union. On the birth-day of Herod a magnificent feast is set before the lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee. That day shall call a martyr to heaven, and stamp with indelible infamy the name of Herodias. A deed shall be done, which, while it fills the hearers with horror and astonishment, shall teach mankind that the greatest of prophets and best of men are not more secure from violence than natural death, if with fidelity and courage they execute the trust committed to them.

Salome, the daughter of Herodias by her lawful husband, is present at this pompous festivity, and dances before the assembled guests. In all ages and nations this hath been a method of expressing joy and gladness. But that a royal princess should appear in this character

before a set of revellers in their debauch, became only the daughter of an Herodias, educated by such a mother.

Herod, inflamed with wine and thrown off his guard by the performance of Salome, utters an imprudent promise, and confirms it with an oath—"Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom!" O Salome, was not this sufficient? Has not the king offered thee a boon more than equal to thy wishes? Wilt thou require something yet more valuable than the *whole* of his dominions, did they extend to the utmost limits of the world! Will nothing satisfy thee but the honor, the conscience, the soul of thine adopted father? Alas, such is the price which sin never fails to ask, and sinners are too ready to bestow! The glorious opportunity of revenge was not to be lost. Herodias is consulted by her daughter, and the tender Salome returns to the banquet athirst for blood—"Give me in a charger the head of John the Baptist—of one whom thou knowest to be innocent, upright, holy. Make me this sacrifice and I am content." With such eagerness and sagacity doth the adulteress hunt for the precious life! Proverbs, 6 : 26.

Bad as Herod was, the petition of Salome at first shocked him. "The king was sorry." He thought of John's character, the atrociousness of the murder, and the opinion which the world would entertain of the murderer. But the tide which had ebbed soon flowed again, and obliterated in a moment what had been written on the sand during its recess. The love of Herodias—the address of her daughter—the festivity of the season—the presence of the assembled nobles, who had witnessed the promise, and might approve the proposal—all these circumstances on the side of the temptation prevail. Herod himself, on recollection, thinks that the obligation of his oath will afford him a better excuse than can hereafter occur, for complying with the importunity of Herodias,

and silencing a monitor troublesome to them both. Thus, if any extraordinary wickedness is to be effected, religion must be made the pretext. As if wrong became right when acted in the name of God—as if it were more acceptable in his sight to massacre a prophet than to repent of an inconsiderate promise.

The Baptist's fate is determined. "Immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought—and he went and beheaded him in the prison." The deed of darkness was done in its proper season. At midnight the blessed martyr is awakened from that sleep which truth and innocence often secure to their possessor in the most perilous situation. Well do the generality of mankind implore the Almighty to spare them from sudden death, lest it should surprise them in one of their many unguarded hours. But to this holy prisoner no moment could be unseasonable. He had finished the work which God had given him to do. He had kept the faith, and preserved a conscience void of offence. He had done his duty; and he waited daily for his departure. Now therefore is he called from his station with honor, to quit the well-fought field for the palace of the Great King—to refresh himself, after the toil of a laborious day, with the never-failing streams of life and immortality—to exchange his blood-stained armor for a robe of glory—to receive an eternal reward for his temporary labors—to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God—and, as the friend of the bridegroom, to enter into the joy of his Lord. From the gloom and confinement of a prison he passed to the liberty and light of heaven—and while malice was gratified with the sight of his head, and his body was carried in silence to the grave, his triumphant spirit repaired to a Court where mercy and justice are enthroned together with power—where no Herodias thirsts after the blood of a prophet—where he who hath labored with diligence

and sincerity in the work of reformation, cannot fail of welcome acceptance—where the holiness, and zeal, and constancy of the saints are rewarded with blissful immortality—where the righteous “are crowned, and receive palms from the Son of God, whom they have confessed in the world.”

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### 73.—THE MULTITUDE FED.

The Savior of mankind, though on some occasions the object of popular fury unjustly and falsely excited by others, was followed by an admiring multitude. Their well-meant importunity caused him to remove from the land to the sea.\* Still they pursue him with eyes of eager anxiety, and when they perceive his place of destination, they are present, ready to receive him at his landing. The winds or oars did not so swiftly drive on the ship as desire and zeal impelled these ardent followers. Nothing is more acceptable to God than our importunity in seeking him. If he withdraw himself for a while, it is with this view, that we may yet more earnestly seek his face and pant after the blessings of his presence. Jesus seeing a great multitude, passes from the ship to the shore. The same motives which brought him from heaven to earth, brought him also from sea to land—compassion for the souls and bodies of mankind—that he might instruct, and comfort, and heal, and feed them.

Amidst the assembled people, no doubt many were laboring under divers infirmities. What marvel, if the

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\* By the *Sea* is meant the Lake of Galilee, or Gennesareth, on the western side of which stood the city of Tiberias: hence the lake itself is called the Sea of Tiberias, John, 6 : 1.

report of Christ's amazing miracles attracted to him those who stood in need of healing? They found advantages beyond the power of human aid—beyond all that could be derived from the wisdom and experience of mortals. Even now, as heretofore, O Lord, thou art our all-perfect, and bounteous, and benevolent physician, who healest all our diseases, and takest away all our infirmities. O that we would but have recourse to thee in all our spiritual maladies! It would then be as impossible for us to be without help, as for thee to be without power and mercy.

He who had filled the souls of his hearers with a spiritual repast, will now approve himself to be the great Father and Preserver of the world, by whose liberal provision mankind is sustained. The eyes of all wait on thee, O Lord, and thou givest them meat in due season. The eyes of all wait upon thee: thou givest food to all flesh, for thy mercy endureth for ever. Thou openest thine hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness.

The apostles, who had noted the diligent attendance of the multitude, now (towards evening) come to their gracious Master in their behalf. "This is a desert place, and the time is far spent: send the multitude away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." How well does it become spiritual guides to regard the bodily necessities of the people of God! How just reason have the people to expect from their teachers a due proportion of charitable care! Unmeet parsimony here, if the means are afforded us, is not merely odious, but sinful. The same voice which commands us to continue instant in prayer, bids us distribute to the necessities of the saints—admonishes us that we be given to hospitality.

The place was desert—the time, evening. Doubtless our Savior made choice of both these, that there might



be more necessity for his miraculous aid, and greater evidence of his power. When other means fail, the Almighty is ever ready to assist and befriend us—it is on such occasions that we may safely ask and expect his aid. Superfluous benefits can neither be so earnestly desired nor so earnestly sought, nor even so gratefully received from the hands of mercy. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.” Hence is it that the divine assistance comes ever in the greatest exigency of our trials—when our faith, our hope, our zeal have been exercised—when salvation itself is rendered doubly welcome.

The disciples, in a kind concern for the necessities of the multitude, solicit their dismissal. How are they astonished at the reply of their gracious Master! “They need not depart—give ye them to eat.” He knew, though they were ignorant, what supply he intended for his people. His wisdom prepared his servants for the intended miracle—he would perform it after mature deliberation—not abruptly, nor without duly intimating his purpose. Meanwhile his followers, adhering to the literal sense of his command, urged their inability to comply with it—“We have here but five barley loaves and two small fishes.” Alas, how slender a provision was this, even for our Lord and his own disciples! Though every beast of the forest was thine, O Savior, and the cattle upon a thousand hills—thine the corn which covereth the whole surface of the earth—thine all the fowls of the air, and whatsoever passes through the seas—though thou couldst at thy pleasure have assembled innumerable quails, or rained down manna from heaven, yet art thou contented with the humble portion of five barley loaves and two small fishes! Certainly this was thy *will*, not thy *need*—thou wouldst teach us, that our appetites may be relieved, not pampered—that our corruptible body is not to be our master, much less our god; that our glory may not

be our shame, that our end may not be destruction. Meat was ordained for the body, the body for the soul, the soul for God. The more we are devoted to heavenly things, the less shall we be attached to what is earthly. What shall this world be to us, when we are all spirit? According to the degree of our intellectual purity will be our indifference to bodily gratifications.

When we look with the bodily eye on an object, we see an impossibility of those effects which faith can easily apprehend, and omnipotence more easily produce. In such cases, the virtue is not in the means, but in the Agent—"Bring them hither to me." O blessed Lord, how hadst thou implanted in the hearts of thy disciples the duties of mercy and compassion! They regard not their own necessity—they plead not for themselves, nor for the relief of their hunger, but cheerfully contribute the whole of their humble store, willingly yield to thy commands, and trust to thy mercy for their sustenance. O God, when thou callest on us to relieve the necessities of our brethren, let us not be more thrifty than obedient—let not our eye be evil, while thou art good. Better had it been for us to have wanted those gifts ourselves, which we ungratefully withhold from thee.

The great Master of the feast marshals his guests. "He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass." They obey, in faith and joyful expectation. Not a doubt, not a cavil is heard among so many thousands. All meekly look up to Christ for the means of their support, and wait upon his merciful hand. It is easy to preserve our serenity in the midst of abundance—but in the hour of want and adversity to depend on Him who is invisible, to fly to him for succor, and rest with confidence on his promises, this is a true and noble act of faith, worthy of that God who inspires, beholds, approves it.

Christ, who could have multiplied the bread in absence,

or in silence, takes and blesses it before them all—that he might at once show to his admiring guests both the Author and the means of this increase. It is thy blessing, O God, that maketh rich. Some languish in the midst of abundance—others are cheerful and happy in the midst of poverty. Second causes must not be denied their place; but the over-ruling power is from above. Nothing can take away from the right, from the pre-eminence of the Creator.

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.” It is the grain cast into the furrows of the earth, and not that deposited in the storehouse, which yields its rich produce to the husbandman. Christ, when he multiplied the loaves and fishes, gave them to his attendants, not for their own use, but that they might freely dispense them to the people. Away with our weak and parsimonious distrust—God himself, who hath declared that it is more blessed to give than to receive, will recompense the bounty of his servants. Nothing can enrich them like beneficence. Blessed is he that considereth the poor—his children shall not be forsaken—his seed shall not beg their bread.

The amazed disciples set the miraculous food before their guests. Not even Judas reserves a share to himself till our Savior’s commands are literally obeyed. The whole multitude eat, and are filled—twelve baskets of fragments remain, when all are satisfied. O work of boundless omnipotence! The right hand of the Lord is exalted—the right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass. If he prepare a table for his Israel in the desert, their bread shall be the food of angels—a no less marvellous extent of his bounty provides for the sustenance of five thousand men, besides women and children. The measure of his beneficence cannot but run over. Not according to our merits, but his mercy, do we receive blessings at his hands. O Lord, we are full of thy good-

ness—let our hearts and voices be full of thy praise!

Yet while we wonder at this thy miracle, O merciful Savior, let us not forget the *daily* exertions of thy munificence. Whence is it that we have our continual provision? One and the same gracious hand does all. If the Israelites are fed with manna in the desert, and with corn in Canaan, both proceed from the same power and the same bounty. If the disciples and the people are fed by the *bread* multiplied, and we by the *grain* multiplied, both are the act of the same omnipotence. What is this but a perpetual miracle, O God, which thou workest for our preservation? Without thee, there is no more power in the grain to multiply, than in the bread. It is thou that givest it a body at thine own pleasure, and to every seed his own body. Why should thy goodness be less magnified because it is universal? Thou visitest the earth, and blessest it—thou makest it very plenteous—thou preparest corn, for so thou providest for it—thou waterest her furrows—thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof—thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blessest the increase of it—thou crownest the year with thy goodness—the folds are full of sheep—the valleys are covered over with corn—they shout for joy—they also sing!



#### 74.—CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA.

Both the created world in general, and its component parts, are in equal subjection to the Maker of all things. Our Savior, who had approved his power on the land, will now show it with respect to the air and waters. He who had preserved the multitude from the peril of hunger in the desert, will now preserve his disciples from the peril of the tempest in the sea.

The day was now far spent; and at this unusual hour our blessed Lord constrains his disciples to depart, and to leave him in mysterious solitude. The people, whose love and thankfulness were now raised to the highest pitch, would have forced on his acceptance those honors which had so long been usurped from the family of David. But the kingdom of our Savior was not of this world. To avoid the proffered sceptre he retires in haste from the multitude, and withdraws into the lonely wilderness. When the *glory* of the world pressed upon him, he fled away from an earthly diadem—when the hour of his *passion* was come, he voluntarily surrendered himself to his persecutors. And is there less danger in suffering, than in outward dignity and prosperity? Blessed Jesus, why do we dote on those earthly distinctions which thou didst so studiously avoid? How can we believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor which cometh from God only?

Devotion, as well as humility, draws our Lord aside from his followers—he went alone up to the mountain to pray. Thou, O Savior, to whom the greatest throng was a solitude, when compared with the host of angels that surround thy throne of glory; thou, who wert incapable of distraction from thy gracious Father with whom thou wert ever one; wouldst yet retire, as man, for the opportunity of prayer—to teach us, who are ever assaulted by wandering thoughts and the intrusions of a giddy world, how best to frame our minds to address the majesty of Heaven. Thus didst thou pray for us, who are unable of ourselves to ask—unworthy to be heard but by the efficacy of thy prayers. Lord, how assiduous should we be in our supplications to the throne of mercy, when thou, who art the God of all power, where thou mightest have commanded, wouldst entreat? Therefore do we pray, because thou hast left us the example—therefore do we hope to be answered in our prayers,

because thou didst pray for us on earth, and now makest intercession for us in heaven.

The night approached. The disciples had long waited for their Master, and could not without regret forsake the shore—but his command was positive, and admitted of no evasion. They were “constrained” to depart. The moments of their expectation, so tedious to themselves, were employed by our blessed Lord in holding converse with his Father. He was on the mount, they on the sea—yet, while he was thus employed in his sublime contemplations, he could see his absent disciples, and pity them while tossed on the waves. That all-piercing eye is restrained by no limits. At once he beholds the highest heavens, and the midst of the sea; the glory of his Father and the misery of his servants. Whatever prospects present themselves to his view, he can bestow the tenderest compassion on the distressed of mankind.

How much more, O Savior, from the height of thine eternal felicity, dost thou look down on us thy poor creatures, buffeted by the unquiet waves of this troublesome world, by the rude and boisterous storms of affliction? Thou didst foresee the toil and danger of these thy disciples—and yet wouldst send them away, that they might experience the horrors of the tempest. Thou who couldst prevent our sufferings by thy power, wilt permit them in thy wisdom—that thou mayst glorify thy mercy in our deliverance, and confirm our faith by the event of our calamities.

How do all things apparently conspire to fill the disciples with consternation! The night was dark and tempestuous; their Master was absent, the sea was strong, the winds high and contrary. Had their Lord been with them, howsoever the elements had raged, they would have considered themselves secure. Had the waves been tranquil, or the winds propitious, they might have remained in a state of serenity during his absence—now,

the season, the wind, the sea, and the retirement of their Master contribute to render them miserable. Sometimes the providence of God thinks fit so to direct the course of events, that to his most faithful servants there appears no glimpse of comfort; but such a universal gloominess, as if heaven and earth had conspired to overwhelm them with sorrow. Thou, O Savior, in the stormy night of thine adversity, in the bitterness of thine agonized spirit, didst exclaim with accents of despair, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet in all these extremities of wretchedness our heavenly Father designs the increase of his glory and ours—he has in view the triumph of our faith, the reward of our victory.

Through the tedious and threatening night the disciples are beset with danger and horror, abandoned as it were to the fury of the winds and waves—but in the fourth watch, when they are wearied with labor and sorrow, they hear the voice of their gracious Redeemer.

At their entrance into the ship, at the rising of the tempest, at the close of the day, they heard not of their Master—but when they had long been vexed by the winds and waves, and their own troubled thoughts, at the dawn of day, and not till then, Jesus came unto them. He had purposely absented himself, that he might exercise their patience—that he might teach them to wait on divine providence—that their devotions might be animated, not weakened, by delay—that they might give more grateful welcome to their deliverance. Thus, O God, even thus thou dost at this hour deal with thy servants. We are often cast upon the sea, the winds rage, the billows swell, and thine absence heightens our sorrows—but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. Heaviness may continue for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. O let us not faint under adversity—but let us wait for thee, depend on thy mercy, and trust in thee with undaunted patience and holy resolution!

Thou camest at last, O Savior—but yet so, that at first there was more of dread than of joy in thy presence. Thy coming was both miraculous and fearful. The God of elements passed through the air—walked upon the waters—making no impression on that liquid pavement, but consolidating the waves, that they might yield a firm support to his sacred feet. Alas, why are the disciples terrified at his appearance? What object could be so pleasing to their eyes as their beloved Master? What could be a greater proof of his Divine power, than was presented to their view at this moment? The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, and were afraid—the depths also were troubled. The floods are risen, O Lord—the floods have lift up their voice—the floods lift up their waves. The waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly—but yet the Lord, who dwelleth on high, is mightier.

Lo, they who had most especial occasion of joy and grateful adoration, are terrified and affrighted—not at the coming of their Lord, but at the *manner* of his coming. The wonderful works of God, if we see them not with the eye of faith, are liable to dangerous misapprehension. The very sunbeams to which we are indebted for our sight, if we view them intensely, dazzle and overpower us. Wretched mortals are too apt, on all occasions, to question the most salutary truths, to fly from their own safety, to mistake the kind intentions of their best Benefactor.

But *why* are the disciples thus troubled? “They supposed that they had seen a spirit.” That there hath been such intercourse between the visible and invisible world, and their respective inhabitants, has been a truth undoubtedly received, though in the dark times of superstition much fraud and collusion were mingled with reality. Crafty men and lying spirits agreed together to abuse a credulous world. But even where there was not



truth, there was horror. The good angels themselves were not seen without fear—their appearance was deemed a prelude to immediate death—how much more were the malignant powers of darkness objects of terror and consternation?

Yet wherefore should they fear? Evil spirits are present, though unseen—equally armed for mischief, though unknown and unsuspected. Visibility adds nothing to their power or their malice. Had the eyes of the disciples been opened they would, like the servant of the prophet, have seen more *with* them than *against* them—a sure though invisible guard of more powerful spirits, and themselves under the protection of the God of spirits, who, singly, can control all the principalities of hell. But their faith was in the bud, and the appearance of this dreaded object was sudden, and afforded no time of recollection to their thoughts.

O the wickedness of our frail nature, so easily terrified at the idea of those adversaries whom we profess daily to resist and vanquish—against whom the decree of God hath opposed us in an everlasting conflict! Are not these the men commissioned by their Lord, not only to heal the sick, but to cast out devils? Are not these the men who returned with joy, and boasted of their victory over the emissaries of Satan? Yet now, when their disturbed imagination represents to them an unembodied phantom, they are overwhelmed with sudden fear. What power there is in the eye to betray the heart!

It was high time for our Savior to speak. The tempest, the darkness, the supposed apparition had almost bereaved his disciples of their senses. How sweet, how seasonable is his mercy! How are their imaginary terrors mitigated and done away by the sound of his gracious voice! “Be of good cheer—it is I—be not afraid.” There needs no other cordial to the drooping soul. In the worst of our afflictions let us but be assured that

Christ is with us, and in spite of hell we are safe. God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea—though the waters rage and swell—though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same.

Thy word, O blessed Jesus, was evidence enough—so well were the disciples acquainted with the accents of their Master that their sorrow is at once turned into joy. Thou art the good Shepherd. We are not of thy flock if we know not thy voice. The same Divine person who spake unto Moses, “I am that I am,” saith unto his terrified disciple, “It is I—I, your friend and Master—I, the Creator and Redeemer of the world—I, the commander of winds and waters—I, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth—I, the God of spirits.” O powerful and gracious word of a compassionate Savior, able to calm all tempests, able to revive all hearts—“Be of good cheer—it is I—be not afraid.”



#### 75.—PETER WALKING ON THE SEA.

No sooner hath Jesus said, “It is I,” than Peter, with all the impatience of joy, calls him by the name of “Master.” On every occasion the fervent zeal of this apostle made him foremost in bearing testimony to his Lord. While his companions were silent, while as yet our Savior was at a distance from the shattered vessel, Peter owns his Master and requests permission to approach him. Yet how is this love and courage contrasted by doubt and fear! What a mixture do we behold, even in this illustrious disciple, of faith

and distrust! It was faith that said, "Master"—it was distrust that added, "*If* it be thou." It was faith that said, "Bid me come unto thee," (implying that the word of Christ could enable, as well as command,) and that, on receiving permission, durst step down upon that watery pavement—it was distrust, that, upon the vehemence of a mighty wind, feared. It was in faith that he walked—it was in distrust that he began to sink—it was in faith that he cried, "Lord, save me!" O imperfect condition of the holiest saint on earth, wherein no gold is so pure as not to be alloyed with baser elements! The fulness of grace can only be found in the fulness of glory—our very virtues here below are mingled with infirmity and corruption. Hereafter the children of God shall shine as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father, when they shall be invested with the bright beams of heavenly radiance—on earth they are but in their dawn, where light is necessarily blended with darkness. Far be it from us to be discouraged by a sense of our infirmities. He who alone fashioned the heart of man, best knoweth whereof we are made—he remembereth that we are but dust.

Let others then cavil at thy request, O blessed apostle—let others descant on thy weakness—I admire and venerate thy faith, thy fervor, thine intrepidity; while in no faltering accent thou didst exclaim, "Bid me come unto thee on the waters!" Thou mightst have suspected that the *voice* of thy Master was as imitable by the imagined spirit as his person—thou mightst have dreaded the raging tempest, the threatening billows, the yielding nature of that treacherous element—but thy desire to approach thy Savior leads thee to banish every thought of fear. "O my Lord and Master—all things are possible to thee—thou canst command both the waves and me thy servant—thou art great in power, and knowest them who trust in thee—thou hast thy way in the whirl-

wind, and thy path in the storm. All things obey thee. *Bid me come unto thee upon the waters.*"

The actions of the zealous disciple second his words. No sooner hath our Savior expressed his assent to the courageous request, than he sets his foot on the unquiet sea, disregarding all difficulties, contemning all dangers. We are wont to admire the daring spirit of that man who first committed himself to the sea in a frail bark, guarded as he was by all possible means of safety. How much more signal is the adventurous bravery of this servant of Christ! Well did Peter know, that he who had called could uphold him. He therefore sues to be bidden and trusts to be supported. True faith is not easily terrified or dismayed. Its virtue is represented, not as the achievement of some trivial performance, but as the removing of mountains. Like some heroic champion, it desires the honors of danger, and petitions for the first onset—while the unbeliever is freezing in torpid fear, and consults nothing but his own ease, or his own security.

How easily might our Savior have disappointed the ardor of his apostle, and denied his unprecedented request! "The acts of my omnipotence are not designed as examples to thy weakness. It is no less than presumption in thee, a mortal, to seek to imitate the miraculous works of the Son of God. Remain in thy ship and wonder—thinking thyself sufficiently happy that thou hast a Master to whom winds and waves pay homage and do obeisance." Yet, behold, the assent of our Lord is no sooner solicited than obtained. The suit of *ambition* was suddenly denied to the wife of Zebedee. The suit of *revenge* was not more successful when proffered by her children—but the prayer of *faith*, though its object transcended the very laws of nature, met with no denial from the Lord of mercy. How much less, O Savior, wilt thou reject thy servants who ask thee for that grace which they continually need? Never did any man say, "Bid me

come unto thee in the way of thy commandments," whom thou didst not *invite*, and *enable* to come.

True faith rests not in mere speculation, but decides and executes. If we rest contented with a vain and fruitless desire without actually endeavoring to present ourselves before God, we feel only the faint and delusive impulses of self-deceit. Blessed Savior, thou hast commanded us, in spite of all perils, all obstacles whatever, to seek thy face. Thy face, Lord, will we seek. The waves of this troublesome world shall not affright us—the winds and storms of temptation shall not withhold us—no way can be otherwise than safe while thou art the end.

The apostle, like his divine Master, walks upon the waves. Supported by the power of Christ, and by his own faith, he is safe in the midst of danger. Had it not been for that power, that faith would have proved vain. Had it not been for that faith, that power would never have been exerted. While we are here in this world, we walk upon the waters. Still the means of our preservation are the same. Without the assistance of Christ we perish; the waters cover us, and the stream goeth over our soul—without the operation of a true and lively faith, we imitate not the *courage* but the *weakness* of the apostle—who, when he saw the wind boisterous, was afraid—and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, "Lord, save me!"

When he sought permission to walk towards Christ on that liquid pavement, he thought of the waters, but adverted not to the winds which raged on those waters—or if he had prepared his mind for some difficulties, the tempest he had to encounter was beyond the limit of his expectation. Let our haste to approach thee, blessed Lord, be zealous, but not improvident. Before we quit the ship, let us foresee the storm: if we are prepared for the worst, we shall be carried safely over those billows which overwhelm the negligent.

As soon as Peter began to *fear*, he began to *sink*. While he believed, the sea was brass—when he began to distrust, those waves were water. He cannot sink while he relies on the power of his Master—he cannot *but* sink, when once he doubts it. Our faith gives us not only courage but *success*—infidelity makes us liable to every danger, every mischief.

It was the improvidence of Peter not to foresee—it was his weakness to fear. It was the effect of his fear to sink—when lo, in the very moment of extreme peril, his faith revives, breaks through his unbelief, and as he is sinking, bids him exclaim, “Lord, save me!” His heart implores deliverance ere the waters flow over his head—he is aware who could uphold him from sinking, and deliver him, though sunk—and therefore out of the deep he called unto thee, O Lord—and thou didst hear his voice.

It was Christ, the Lord, whom Peter had offended by distrusting. It is Christ, the Lord, to whom he sues for deliverance. His weakness doth not discourage him from his refuge. To whom should we seek for succor, but to thee, O God, who for our sins art justly displeased? Against thee only have we sinned—in thee only is our help. In vain shall all the powers of heaven and earth conspire to relieve us, if thou withhold thine aid. Lord, when we have offended against thy justice by mortal infirmity, teach us to have recourse to thy mercy by faith and true repentance!

That mercy is no sooner sought after than found. “Immediately Jesus put forth his hand and caught him.” Even though he had ceased to trust in that power which alone could preserve him—though he had wronged the care of his blessed Master by weak and ungrounded diffidence, he is not abandoned to destruction. Indignation is disarmed by pity. In a moment that power which created the sea and the dry land is stretched out for his

relief. When did the voice of a believer solicit the mercy of God, and solicit in vain? Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee—thou art great, and doest wondrous things—the right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass.

Jesus, while he saves his trembling apostle from destruction, meets him with the voice of just reproof. “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Well as our Savior approved the zeal and sincerity of his servant, he would not wink at his infirmities. Where there was such ground for confidence, the doubts of infidelity were worthy of censure and reprehension; but the sin of Peter was forgiven, for he loved much. It is the fruit of thy favor and mercy, O Lord, that we escape *judgment*—we are not therefore to escape *rebuke*. Had not Peter found grace in thy sight, he might have been suffered to sink in silence—now he is saved, with reproof. There may be more compassion in frowns than in smiles. Correct us, O Savior, in judgment, not in thine anger, lest thou bring us to nothing. O let the righteous God smite us, when we offend, with his gracious admonition—it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break the head—for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, even as a father his son in whom he delighteth.

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#### 76.—J A I R U S .

Already had our blessed Savior demonstrated to mankind that he was the Lord of life and death. Already had he commanded the return of a departed spirit, and brought it from the unseen world, that it might be reinstated in its earthly mansion. No wonder that the fame

of such an astonishing act diffused itself far and wide throughout the region of Judea. No wonder that all who stood in need of assistance had recourse to the Lord of mercy and power. The people of God resorted in countless multitudes to mount Carmel to behold the miracles of Elijah. Lo, a greater than Elijah is here.

Even among the rulers of the synagogue prejudice could not prevail over natural affection. When Jairus beheld his dear, his only child in the agonies of death, he paid no attention to those hard sayings which ungodly sinners spake against the Savior of the world. The question of triumphant bigotry, "Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed?" was not unanswerable. Yes, they have believed. With the heart they have believed unto righteousness, and with the mouth they have confessed unto salvation. While Jesus spake unto the people, there came a *Ruler* and worshipped him, saying, "My little daughter lieth at the point of death—but come and lay thy hands upon her, and she shall live." O Jairus, great is thy faith, founded on an immoveable Rock. The winds and storms of affliction, the poisonous arrows of death itself are directed against it in vain. Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he shall deliver thee.

Behold and see how gracious the Lord is—blessed is the man which putteth his trust in him. No sooner hath the tender father offered up his petition, than he receives an answer of peace. "Fear not—believe only, and she shall be made whole." Instantly our Savior directs his footsteps to the house of his suppliant—Jairus accompanies him, full of anxious expectation, not yet aware that the object of his parental fondness was even now a lifeless corpse. These dreadful tidings meet him on his way, while the multitude, thronging round our blessed Lord, detain him from a speedy arrival.

That not a moment might be unemployed in acts of mercy, our Savior works a miracle of healing in his very



progress. Even by virtue of his garment he delivers a miserable sufferer from the jaws of death. How shall we imitate thee, gracious Lord, if we suffer our hands to relax from works of benevolence? Our life passes away with our time—we lose that hour which we improve not.

While this recent display of Divine omnipotence elevates the heart of Jairus, and awakens such sentiments in his mind that against hope he believeth in hope, the importunity of the multitude on the other hand awakens the most painful emotions. He was imploring the mercy of Christ for his daughter—the assembled people impede the Lord of life from blessing his roof with his presence. Every man is most sensible of his own necessity—we cannot be too emulous of the Divine favor, of the Divine benediction.

The only child of this ruler lay dying when he came to solicit the help of Christ, and was dead while he solicited it. There was hope in her sickness—in its progress there was fear—in its event he is told to despair of comfort. “Thy daughter is dead—trouble not the Master.” Had Jairus betaken himself for aid to a merely finite being, the word had been just. But since an omnipotent agent is concerned, death itself is no impediment to his power. Thy daughter is dead, O faithful and devout parent, but cannot he, in whose hands are the issues of life and of death, bring her back again? Cannot thy Lord and Savior be gracious to thee, that thy child may revive?

The messenger addressed himself to the ear of an afflicted father. Jairus receives the sad confirmation of his fears, and is now about to resign himself to the bitterness of sorrow. But that Divine Benefactor of mankind, whose office it was to comfort the miserable, speaks peace to the wretched parent, and awakens his faith and his hope. “Be not afraid—only believe.” Alas, who, under such a fatal calamity, could be insensible to sorrow? Who could do otherwise than grieve for the loss of an only

child? Who could do otherwise than imagine, that death, having once seized on the innocent victim, would not abandon its prey?

But perfect faith, as well as perfect love, casteth out fear. Unbelief is nearly allied to that timid, suspicious temper, which will take nothing upon trust, even where God himself is Agent. If our Lord had commanded Jairus what was easy to perform, where had been the praise of his obedience? While the child was yet alive, to believe that she might recover was no difficult operation of the mind—but to believe that the dead should live again was an illustrious proof of faith and piety—faith, stronger than death itself, and able to burst those iron bonds like threads of tow. How much natural impossibility is there in the return of our bodies from the dust of the earth, into which, through many degrees of dissolution, they shall at last be mouldered? Yet be not afraid, O my soul—believe only; and in thy flesh thou shalt see God.

The work might have been as easily done by a distant command—the power of Christ was there, while himself was absent—but he will go personally to the place, that he might be confessed the Author of so great a miracle. Blessed Savior, it was thy delight to repair to the house of mourning—thou hadst no greater joy, when thou wert a partaker of our human nature, than to pour the full measure of comfort into the heart of the afflicted.

What a confusion is there in worldly sorrow! How is the awful silence of that lifeless body contrasted by the shrieks of the wretched mother, the loud lamentations of the attendants, the cries of sympathizing friends, the discordant minstrelsy hymning its funeral dirge! Soon does the Redeemer banish these clamorous mourners. Not that he wished to check those tears, which in circumstances of such a nature are natural, are unavoidable—not that, with a stern austerity, he was averse to that sublime and heaven-taught art, which enhances joy, and

charms the troubled soul\*—but because he knew these doleful ceremonies to be premature and unseasonable. “Give place—the maid is not dead, but sleepeth.” The grave itself is but a place of rest, whence the christian shall be recalled by the trumpet of the Archangel—but the daughter of Jairus, so soon to be awakened, was but in a kind of temporary repose. Death and sleep are alike to thee, O Lord—thy voice can recall us from the sleep of death—without thee we are not able to arise from our ordinary slumber.

Before, the people, and the domestics of Jairus, held Jesus for a prophet—now they account him an idle visionary. They who came professedly to mourn, cannot refrain from contemptuous laughter—“Who ever died, if this be sleep? Have we officiated at so many funerals, have we seen and wept over so many corpses, and cannot we distinguish between sleep and death? The eyes are fixed—the breath is gone—the limbs are cold and lifeless—Why does he mock that sorrow which it is beyond his power to remove?” How easily may we be led astray by prejudice and self-conceit, in things pertaining to Heaven! The proud philosopher, the haughty moralist, are ready to insult and blaspheme God when he speaks of things beyond their compass—but God is not mocked by the unbelief of his creatures. He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh *them* to scorn—the Lord shall have them in derision. These vain and foolish Jews, in spite of former convictions, persist in error and incredulity; and deem the words of eternal wisdom and mercy no better than foolishness.

The sorrowing parents share not in these senseless cavils. They look towards the Lord of life with eyes which give utterance to all the emotions of their hearts

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\* “And when they had SUNG AN HYMN they went out into the Mount of Olives.” Matthew, 26 : 30. Mark, 14 : 26.

—and await the issue in trembling expectation. Three chosen disciples attend their Master into the chamber of death. O Savior, when is thy goodness discouraged by the petulance of scornful infidelity? In spite of turbulent opposition, or wayward folly, thy Father worketh hitherto, and thou workest. It is enough that thy marvellous acts shall honor thee, and convict thy gainsayers. “He took her by the hand, and called, saying, ‘*Maid, arise,*’ and she arose straightway.”

How could that voice be other than effectual? He who made that hand, now touched it. He who hereafter shall say “Arise, ye dead,” now said, “Maid, arise.” The soul is in the power of the God who gave it. He saith to it, “Go,” and it goeth—“Come,” and it cometh. The late dissolved spirit knows its place, knows its office, and at the divine injunction returns to that abode, which, by the same injunction, it had so lately quitted. The astonished and enraptured parents behold the darling of their hearts restored not merely to life, but to health, and vigor, and activity. Omnipotence goes not the pace of nature—all the immediate works of God are, like himself, perfect. “She arose and walked—and he commanded to give her meat.”

O Savior, when thou dost enjoin our souls to arise from the death of sin, they cannot but obey thee—when thou shalt enjoin our bodies to arise from our grave, they shall revive at thy voice—in vain shall our sin or the grave withhold us from thee. “For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

## 77.—THE SAMARITAN VILLAGE.

The time now approached “when Jesus should be received up”—but he would take death in his way. He would be lifted up on his cross ere he ascended to heaven. Yet the contest is not mentioned by the divine historian—we hear only of the victory. Blessed Lord, the members of thy mystical body must also die, that they may be glorified—like thee, they must look beyond the grave to that transcendent joy which awaits them—like thee, they must rise superior to that hour of trial, which will terminate in a blissful immortality.

Armed with divine resolution, our Savior, though aware of all the malice of his enemies, undauntedly “set his face to go to Jerusalem:” to the abode of his most inveterate opponents, the amphitheatre of his conflicts, the place where he was appointed to die. In his progress from Galilee he passes through the region of Samaria, attended by the chosen band of his disciples.

The animosity between the Jews and Samaritans had ever been productive of the most unhappy consequences to the contending parties. Fatally mistaking the spirit of religion, they polluted those streams of truth which should ever flow in the utmost purity, by controversy and unhallowed strife. No enmity is so desperate as that which arises from theological disputes. The champions in this unnatural contest dare to approach the Prince of Peace with confused noise, with wrath, and hatred, and contention—being more persecuting, more intolerant, as they are more deeply entangled in the mazes of error. Wilt thou not visit for these things, O God of truth? Shall not thy soul be avenged on such profanations as these?

Our Savior demanded nothing at the hands of these bigoted Samaritans, but the accustomed rites of hospi-

tality for himself and his companions—a little food—a place where he might lay his head. Even this is refused, “because his face was as though he would go up to Jerusalem.” The Lord of nature is denied an insignificant portion of his gifts—he who could have commanded angels, sues to Samaritans—he whose unutterable majesty fills the heaven and earth, asks a few hours’ shelter in an obscure village, and asks it in vain. The ardor of his indignant disciples, James and John, cannot brook this act of unkindness. With a zeal yet more reprehensible than the offence which called it forth, these “sons of thunder” would at once have recourse to the most horrible of all vengeance—“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, as Elias did?” Who can but shudder at this presumption, at this vindictive haste in those whom God had separated from a sinful world! This awful instrument of divine indignation had been very rarely exerted against mankind. The oracles of truth record no other instances of it than the tremendous doom of Sodom and its neighbor-cities—the punishment of the rebellious Israelites—the trial of that great pattern of all patience—and the instance which the sons of Zebedee now would urge as a precedent. O God, how unfrequent are the demonstrations of thy wrath in comparison with the multitude of thy tender mercies!

Though the anger of the sons of Zebedee could not but be excited to see the great prophet and Savior of the world rejected, and treated with unkindness, we cannot palliate their rash cruelty, their unjust and inordinate rage. Nothing is so evil as the corruption of what is good—a right zeal is not more laudable than its excess is hateful and dangerous. Without the use of fire man would inevitably perish under the severity of the winter’s cold—but what can be more dreadful than the fury of this devouring element when it invades our dwell-

ings, or consigns our possessions to sudden desolation ?

Thus sometimes zeal becomes indiscretion—sometimes frenzy—sometimes even murder. “ They that *kill* you, shall think they do God service.” Blessed is that zeal which is well grounded and well governed—grounded on the word of truth, not on unstable fancies—governed, not by intemperate zeal, but by wisdom and charity: wisdom, to avoid rashness ; charity, to avoid all just offence.

O pure and heavenly zeal, the genial warmth and vital temper of piety, whither hast thou withdrawn thyself from the hearts of mankind ? To what can we attribute thy departure but to the dreadful ravages of sin ? How many are there who think that wisdom consists only in cold indifference—who freeze in miserable apathy, when they should glow with fervent devotion ! How quick and apprehensive are we in cases where our own honor is concerned, how insensible of the indignities offered to our Savior !

The disciples, erring in a contrary extreme, want not a pretext for their vehement request. “ Elias did so. Why should not we ? He was a holy prophet—the occasion which led him to inflict such vengeance was not altogether dissimilar—yet there the indignity was offered to the servant, here to the Master—there, to a man ; here to the Son of God. Wilt thou not that we command fire from heaven, as Elias did ? ” There is nothing more perilous than to consider all the acts of godly men as examples. Not only because they had the weaknesses and infirmities inseparable from nature, but because in some extraordinary circumstances the commission which they had received from above gave them that peculiar warrant, which if we expect, we shall expect in vain. We cannot therefore be too cautious in our imitation of the best examples, save of thine only, O blessed and holy Jesus—lest we be drawn suddenly into the com-

mission of sin, and our well-meant actions prove the destruction of our peace.

The Son of God forbears not to chide where he best loves—he blames not our ardor, but will moderate its excesses. “Ye know not what spirit ye are of.” The fault of uncharitableness cannot be atoned for by zeal—the God whom we serve will not have the best cause supported by the violation of our duty. Can his good Spirit excite us to revenge, to animosity, to thirst of blood? That Spirit, when he assumed a visible form, came not as a ravening *eagle*, but in a bodily shape as a *dove*. Not in the whirlwind, not in the fire, but in the “still small voice” did God manifest himself to his prophet. O Savior, what need we any other precedent than thine, by whose name we are called? Thou camest to thine own—thine own received thee not. Didst thou call for fire to come down from heaven and consume them? Didst thou not rather pray and weep, and bleed for their sakes? Better were it for us, O Lord, to have no spirit, than to have any other than that which we derive from thee. Thou hast left us an example, that we should follow thy steps.

“The Son of man came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” There, there is the true and genuine spirit of Christianity. Then are our intentions praiseworthy, and our actions laudable, when they accord with this pattern of all grace and excellence. Blessed Savior, when we contemplate thy dealings with mankind, we find many lives preserved by thee from perishing—some that had actually perished, recalled by thy voice: never any one destroyed at thy command. Thy power was able to control all nature. The unfruitful fig-tree indeed withered away at the blasting of the breath of thy displeasure—but to man, how favorable wast thou, how indulgent? So rejected as thou wert, so reviled, so persecuted, so laid wait for, betrayed, apprehended, arraign-



ed, condemned, crucified, whom didst thou strike dead for these heinous indignities? When the zeal of thy faithful apostle smote off the ear of one of thine enemies who came upon thee to take away thy life, instantly thou didst touch his ear and heal him. When, after thy last glorious victory, thou didst rejoin thy disciples who had forsaken thee in the conflict, thou didst hail them by the endearing name of brethren. When bigotry and prejudice refused thee the common offices of hospitality, thou didst depart in peace and meekness to another village.

Surely the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. O thou preserver of men, how can we sufficiently love and adore thy mercy! Teach us to walk in thy footsteps, blessed Lord. Send thine Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from us, with all malice—and let us be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Amen.

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#### 78.—THE TEN LEPERS.

It is the prerogative of misery to unite the most estranged hearts in one common band of friendship and society. Even the fixed and hereditary rancor between Jews and Samaritans gave way when this more powerful interest prevailed. At the entrance of a certain village Jesus was addressed by ten men that were lepers—and one of them was a Samaritan.

Excluded from all intercourse with the rest of mankind, these wanderers sought relief in the company of each other. Community of suffering has made them

friends, whom religion itself has disjoined. The unhappy suppliants, with one consent, direct their steps towards our Savior—not casually, but on due deliberation: they had long and anxiously waited for this propitious moment, when the approach of Jesus led them to hope for deliverance from so loathsome and miserable a disease. The mighty Naaman, valiant and successful in war, the friend and favorite of his master, scrupled not, under the same circumstances of distress, to take his journey from Syria to the banks of Jordan for his cure. We are all sensible enough of our bodily infirmities. O that we could be equally weary of those diseases which affect our souls and endanger our eternal happiness! Surely our spiritual maladies are no less than mortal, if they be not healed. O Lord, from thy power and thy mercy alone can we expect a remedy. Give us grace to seek thee, give us patience to wait for thee—so wilt thou surely find us, to our comfort and deliverance. Return, O God of hosts—show the light of thy countenance upon us—and we shall be made whole.

The lepers, standing afar off, as the law of Moses enjoined, lift up their voices with one accord, and address the Lord of life with all the energy of impassioned sorrow. “Jesus—Master—have mercy on us!”

Distant with respect to place, they are not distant with respect to the acceptance of their prayer. The Lord is nigh unto all such as call upon him, to all such as call upon him in truth. O Savior, while we are far off from thee, thou art near to us—never do we make such successful application to thee, as when we stand aloof in holy diffidence. The consideration of thy mercy leads us to come boldly to the throne of thy grace—but oh, how great is the majesty of that throne! how great the unworthiness which we bring with us into that awful presence!

The sorrow of these sufferers, no less than their distance, bade them cry aloud for help. Affliction “opens

the mouth of the dumb, and makes the tongues of them that cannot speak, eloquent." Jew and Samaritan unite in one common supplication. If we would obtain the favor of heaven, we must not content ourselves with private and solitary devotion—we must join our forces together, and put forth all their strength. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. No fervent prayer is unheard, or unanswered; but when many faithful hearts unite in their petition, they have the promise of peculiar favor from above. How can we fail of a blessing, (if we are not wanting to ourselves, and to God,) when the word of truth has declared, "All things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive?"

O wonderful power of the Son of God! It was not necessary that the compassionate hand of Jesus should reach the objects of his pity. While yet they stood afar off, conscious of their infirmity, and not daring to approach, a glance of his eye, a word from his sacred lips accomplishes the work of mercy—"Go, show yourselves to the priests"—with whom, according to the institutions of Moses, it rested to ascertain the reality of a leper's cure. They obeyed—"and it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." Verily thou art the God that doeth wonders. The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation—the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.

Not only *evil* must be avoided, but *offence*. Christ himself, who was above the law, would not transgress it. Of old he had ordained (through the ministry of the patriarch) that all persons restored to health after the plague of the leprosy should present themselves before God and his consecrated servant, with a sacrifice of grateful love. The ordinances delivered from Sinai now approached to their consummation—but the veil as yet was not taken away—he will not anticipate the appointed time, when the law should be succeeded by the Gospel.

Alas, who were they, blessed Lord, to whom thou didst enjoin this tribute of respect and observance to be paid? When we look to the priests of the Jews, we see pride, corruption, hypocrisy, professed hostility to thyself—yet all this will not induce thee to omit the attention due to their office. Had this duty been neglected, what clamors would have been raised by the adversary! What impious murmurs against the Lord of life! They who scrutinized all his actions with such jealous malignity, who could discover a subject of accusation in the unwashed hands of his disciples, in the works of his mercy shown on the Sabbath, how would they have calumniated him, if by his neglect the law of leprosy had been palpably transgressed! Now, what a testimony is afforded to the power and truth of the Messiah! How could the Jews, whether priests or people, refrain from believing in our Savior, when such a positive proof is afforded them of his divine mission? One of themselves, even a teacher of their own, (Rabbi Menachem on Levit. 13,) asserts, that, by the common opinion of his nation, leprosy is the finger of God—a disease peculiarly of his sending and removing, and that it is not lawful for the physician even to attempt the cure of it. How could they but say, when they saw such a display of omnipotence, “This work is supernatural—no limited agency could do this—how is he otherwise than God, if his power be infinite?” Though their unhallowed lips refuse to bear testimony to the truth, their own eyes shall be witnesses and judges of their conviction.

The lepers themselves consider not the nature of the command—they have respect to the authority of him who gave it. They obeyed, and went. Had they refused to comply, they had still been lepers—now, with what speed does the blessing overtake their obedience? The law enjoined this attendance on the priest, in case they were actually healed—now, they only anticipate the time

a little, and do that upon hope, which they must have done afterwards, when hope should be turned into joy. But how is the mercy of Christ heightened, as well by the horrid nature of the calamity from which he rescued his suppliants, as by the easiness of the task he prescribed as a prelude to their recovery! It is the bounty of that God whom we serve, to reward our worthless endeavors with infinite requitals—he will have no proportion between our acts and his remunerations.

Yet, besides this recompense of obedience, O Lord, thou hast respect to thine own glory. Had not these lepers been healed in the way, but at the end of their journey, the miracle might not have been attributed to thee, its only author—the priests might have challenged it to themselves—they might have ascribed it to the efficacy of their own prayers, not to the object of their jealousy and hatred. Now there can be no pretence whatever for competition—the leprosy vanishes *in the way*—neither thy power nor thy praise admits of participation.

What joy, what amazement fill the hearts of this once mournful train, when each in the same moment finds himself restored to health, and to the enjoyment of those privileges of which his calamity had deprived him! How do they congratulate each other! how do they pant for the happy moment when their friends and families shall welcome them to their arms! Their society, which had alleviated their sorrows, now heightens their new joy.

All were healed—one only was properly thankful—one man alone forsakes his companions, to prostrate himself at the feet of Christ, and to acknowledge his mercy. There are cases in which singularity is not only lawful but laudable. “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” It is a base and unworthy thing to be subjected to the example of others in cases of obvious duty. When evil is proposed to be done, or good to be neg-

lected, how much better is it to walk in the right path alone, than to go astray with numbers!

But whom do we behold thus pouring forth the effusions of a grateful heart? Alas, were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? One man only, and he is a Samaritan, ascribes the glory to God, and shows forth his praise. Blessed Lord, what an awful example is here afforded us of the folly, the sin, the danger of spiritual pride! The Jews, to whom the terms of salvation were freely offered, neither valued the gift nor adored the Giver. The Gentiles heard with joy the blissful tidings—they heard, they believed, they obeyed. Now therefore are they no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God—and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

Even now, Lord, but for thy mercy we are aliens from the commonwealth of the true Israel—our sins, like a leprosy, infect our souls, and fill our hearts with all uncleanness. We are excluded from the gate of heaven, into which no impurity can enter. Lo, we betake ourselves to thee—thou beholdest our distress, and thy word effects our deliverance. Thou wilt make us a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within us. No longer are we separated from our God—no longer are we objects of abhorrence to ourselves and to thee. By grace are we saved, through faith—and that not of ourselves—it is the gift of God.

And shall we then imitate the churlish ingratitude of the Jewish objects of thy favor? Shall we not hasten to express, at thy feet, our sense of thine inestimable mercies? Shall we not turn back from all other pursuits, of what nature soever, and adore thee, our Redeemer? Shall we not celebrate thy praise, O thou who alone doest mighty acts—whose mercy endureth for ever—who forgivest all our iniquities—who healest all our diseases—who sav-

est our life from destruction—who crownest us with loving-kindness and tender mercies? Angels and archangels worship thee—the earth declareth thy power—the heaven thy glory. All thy works praise thee for ever—let not man be all that is insensible, all that is ungrateful in the world!

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### 79.—THE TRANSFIGURATION.

Hitherto have we contemplated thee, O Lord, in thy state of great humility—thy mercy now vouchsafes us a glimpse of that ineffable glory, whereof we can have no *perfect* idea on this side heaven. When we accompany thee to mount Tabor, we there behold thy majesty, shining even in this region of thy shame and abasement. What then, O what is the splendor of thy celestial throne, the place where thine holiness and thine honor dwelleth! Thou, who didst command thy chosen disciples to be silent on the subject of thy transfiguration till thou wert risen from the dead, now thou art risen and ascended, wilt have it spoken of throughout the world—that all mankind may acknowledge the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in thee bodily—that from this temporary glory some judgment may be formed of that which is everlasting.

“Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they have seen the Son of Man come in his kingdom.” Thine act, O Savior, is the best comment on thy words. Peter and the two sons of Zebedee were they who tasted not of death till their eyes had seen this heavenly image of the royalty of their glorified Master. The promise is immediately followed

by its performance. They are called on to witness that sight which the christian church views at this moment with the eye of faith—she beholds the grandeur of her Lord and Savior—she rejoices, and is glad.

Tradition has ever assigned Mount Tabor as the place where this majestic scene was displayed to the astonished apostles. Surely the place itself was not chosen without some mysterious import, as being itself an image and symbol of that heaven towards which it arose. How many times did God appoint his acts of glory and magnificence to be done on these elevated stations! How often is the region of eternal blessedness described under the name of the holy hill of God! On Horeb he appeared to the great Shepherd of his people—on Sinai was the law delivered in all its sublimity. On Moriah the voice of Jehovah bare witness to the triumphant faith of Abraham—on Rephidim Moses made intercession with God to crown the arms of Israel with victory and glory—on Ebal and Gerizim, the solemn denunciations of the wrath of God against sinners, and his tender mercies towards his faithful servants, were recited to the assembled tribes—on Ramah and Gibeah the sons of the prophets received their visions and revelations from God—on Carmel the prayer of Elijah called down fire from heaven, when the Lord openly showed his righteousness in the sight of all the people. Who knows not that on Mount Sion stood that temple which was the wonder of so many ages, the excellency of holiness and majesty? “I will lift up mine eyes unto the *hills*, from whence cometh my help—my help cometh from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth.”

He whose immensity filleth all space, knows no local distinctions—he is not, as was once impiously suggested, “a God of the mountains, and not a God of the valleys.” But he would teach his peculiar people, that the *mina* should be raised above the earth, towards heaven—that



no intervening object should keep from our view those blissful regions to which our faith and hope are directed to ascend. If we would be transfigured with Christ we must abandon all worldly thoughts, and seek those things which are above—we must leave below the cares, distractions, anxiety, labor, sorrow, servitude of the body, while with the spirit and with the understanding we go up and worship God.

Thus removed from the busy eye of curiosity, the Savior of mankind appeared to his favored disciples in a state of majesty and glory. His face did shine as the sun—his raiment was bright as the light. The law and the prophets, in the person of Moses and Elias, appeared and did homage to the Redeemer. That Moses, with whom the Almighty held converse as a man talketh to his friend—that Elias to whom God manifested himself in the solitude of the wilderness, paid their united adorations to Him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write—to Him who came, not to destroy, but to fulfil their word.

What comfort, what assurance of future blessedness was thus afforded to those living witnesses who were present at this stupendous scene! With what joy did they behold these examples of the glory that shall be revealed! They saw in Moses and Elias what themselves should be, after they had passed through the grave and gate of death. How could they fear being miserable, how could they be apprehensive at the idea of dissolution? If one went from the dead, it was urged that he would impart conviction to the most obdurate. It was urged in reply, that Moses and the prophets bore testimony of equal magnitude and importance. Behold here Moses and the mighty prophet, and them too come as it were from the dead! Behold, and consider that the saints of God are not lost, but departed—gone into a far country with their Lord, to receive a kingdom and to

return. They shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, when Jehovah shall come with ten thousand of his saints. Nor is this the condition of Elias only, who was snatched miraculously to heaven—Moses, who died and was buried, is his associate.

And shall none be seen with God but they who were present in Horeb, in Carmel, in Tabor? When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall *we* also appear with him in glory. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—while neither our sleep nor our change shall separate us from our God. O thou servant of Christ, whether thou art called on to die, as in Mount Nebo, or whether the fiery chariot call thee, amidst the conflagration of a world, from this vale of mortality, remember that thou shalt behold his presence in righteousness; that when thou awakest in his likeness, thou shalt be satisfied with it: so shalt thou triumph over thy last and most dreadful enemy, dispelling all his terrors by the blissful foretaste of glory.

The amazed disciples (their senses being overpowered by the magnificence of the spectacle before them) seem for a while to be lost in speechless ecstasy. Beholding unutterable things, they are entranced, as in some heavenly vision. At last their joy and wonder find words—"Master, it is good for us to be here!"

But while their eyes are thus cheered with visions of glory, what accents meet their ears! On what subject do the great legislator and the illustrious prophet hold converse with their Lord! In the presence of those disciples who still fondly adhered to the expectations of his temporal kingdom, they spake openly of his decease—"they spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." How could the apostles bear the idea of such a parting? The throne of David was in their eye—how could they endure the scandal of the cross? The society of their Master was their joy and life—it was

death to think of his departure. Yet, O Lord, what a time dost thou select for thus announcing thy passion? *When* do thy blessed saints declare the wonders of thy love, and the bitterness of thine approaching sufferings? Even in the hour, when that face did shine as the sun, which should afterwards be bruised and spat upon—when that head was encircled with glory, which should be crowned with thorns—when those garments were bright and glittering, which should be torn and divided by thy rapacious and merciless executioners—when thou wast adored by the spirits of just men made perfect, who shouldst be scorned by the basest of men—in a word, when thou wast invested with the majesty of the eternal God, who shouldst afterwards be exposed to the utmost extremity of reproach, and shame, and torture. O Lord, we learn by this great example the proper subject of our most solemn meditations. We will never forget thy mercy—we will at no period whatever lose sight of the wonders of thy love. Henceforth will we “know nothing save *Jesus Christ and him crucified.*”

O Savior, if thou wert so glorious in Tabor, what art thou now in heaven? If this were the brightness of thy human nature, what is the excellence of thy Godhead? Of this fulness we shall all receive. Thou art our head, we are thy members. We are already delivered from sorrow—hereafter shall we be received unto joy. Thou shalt change our vile body, that it may be like unto thy glorious body. These earthly tabernacles shall be bright as the sun—heaven itself shall be manifest on our countenances—we shall be clothed upon with immortality—and in our flesh we shall see God.

Let us look on ourselves, not so much with contempt of what we are, and were, as in the joyful hope of what we shall be. And when our courage is tried by the change of our bodies from health to sickness, from life to death, let us comfort ourselves with the assurance of *this*

change from dust to incorruption. We are not more sure of our grave than our transfiguration. "All the days of our appointed time will we wait till our change come."

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## 80.—THE TRANSFIGURATION—*continued.*

The display of heavenly glory which shone around the disciples seems almost too magnificent for human nature to sustain. Its effect upon their minds must be conceived—it cannot be painted or described. Scarcely do they lift up their eyes to this manifestation of the divine Majesty, when they cry, in broken accents of rapture, "Master, Master, it is good for us to be here!" They are anxious to prolong the stay of their celestial guests—*"Let us make here three tabernacles—one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.* Here let us abide, and all earthly honors, riches, pleasures, glories will be vain and contemptible. One day, one moment in this blessed society is better than a thousand years spent in the enjoyment of all that is dear or valuable to mortals."

Lo, while they thus speak a cloud overshadows them. That cloud was of old the testimony of God's presence—it covered the mountain, the tabernacle, the oracle. While it bore witness to the majesty of Jehovah, it signified that such majesty was not for the eyes of man to behold. Hereafter a day will come when we shall have the light without a cloud, the clear vision and fruition of God without any manner of interposition. With him is the well-spring of life—in his light we shall see light.

What astonishment was in the souls of the disciples while they stood encompassed by that bright cloud, expecting some miraculous event at the close of the heav-

enly vision! With what inexpressible awe did they hear those sacred words resounding in their ears—“*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased—hear him.*” They need not be told whose that voice was. The place, the words, the subject evinced it. No angel of heaven could have presumed to utter those expressions, whereby the Lord God omnipotent bore witness to the Savior of mankind. How gladly doth Peter afterwards repeat them, to establish and strengthen the faith and hope of his converts! “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father, honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* And this voice (which came from heaven) we heard when we were with him in the holy mount.”

Twice did God speak these words from heaven—at the baptism and the transfiguration of his Son. Here they are uttered as a direct and irrefragable testimony of the Messiah. Moses and Elias were servants—or if sons, they were made so by grace and adoption. Here is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, united with him in one essence, so beloved, that in him, and for his sake, he is well pleased with all mankind. Herein is love, infinite, incomprehensible as the God from whom it flows—love, not confined to the ever-blessed Jesus, but extended to his children, his disciples, his friends, his servants—yea, to all mankind. Without Christ, there is nothing but enmity betwixt God and the soul—with him, all is love and peace. Behold the Son of God, the reconciler of the world, the teacher and legislator of his church! Behold him, demanding our faith, our love, our adoration, our obedience! O Lord, we obey, we love, we believe, we adore. The Lord is our Judge, the Lord

is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King, he will save us.

The bright cloud caused wonder in the disciples—but the voice, though the voice of mercy, overpowered their mortal faculties. Who can blame a frail and perishable creature for being thus affected by the voice of his Creator? Yet this word was merely an exhortation to obedience unto *life*. O God, what shall be the horror and consternation of thine enemies when they hear the dreadful sentence of *death*? Who shall not be afraid in that awful hour, when they who have slighted the gracious invitations of thy love shall call on the rocks to hide them from the terror of thy judgments!

The God of mercy pities our infirmities. While the disciples lay in a state of amazement, their whole souls absorbed by what they had seen and heard, the voice of the Redeemer of mankind awakened and comforted them—"Arise, and be not afraid!" That voice might well raise them from the earth which shall hereafter recall them from the grave. O Savior, let those accents cheer us, let that gracious hand be extended to our relief; whether we are entranced in sorrow, or sleeping in vain security, or even dead in sin, we shall arise.

"They looked up and saw no man, save Jesus alone." They saw him, and doubtless in his wonted form. All was now gone—Moses, Elias, the cloud, the voice, the radiant majesty. Heaven will not allow to earth any long continuance of its glory. Constant happiness can only be looked for and enjoyed in those regions where we shall behold our Savior in his unchangeable brightness—where the light shall be never clouded.

Moses and Elias are gone—Christ only is left. The glory of the law and of the prophets was but temporary—it endured but for a moment, that the bringing in of a better hope might be more conspicuous, more perfect. Jesus Christ alone is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. They came but to bear testimony

to the Messiah—when that is done they are vanished.

But why should *their* departure occasion any regret to the disciples, as long as their Master was yet with them? Had Jesus been gone away, it had been little satisfaction to them, when they recovered their scattered senses, that Moses or Elias, or both were yet on the mount. Their society, though glorious, could not have comforted them—their absence affords not a moment's sorrow. O Savior, it matters not who is away, as long as thou art on our right hand to help and defend us. Thou art God all-sufficient—while thou art our Shepherd we can lack nothing: though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will not fear; for thou art with us.

But, O blessed Lord, why are thine enraptured disciples compelled to silence? Why may they not impart to their companions, why may they not publish to the world, the majesty and greatness of their Lord? It is sufficient that thy wisdom gave the charge, which it had been impiety and madness to disobey. It is not for frail mortality to know the times and the seasons which thou hast put in thine own power. The day was not far distant when thy rising from the dead should take off all restrictions—when the chosen witnesses of thy transfiguration should no longer be obliged to conceal the heavenly vision; but should be at full liberty to confirm the faith of thy church, by recounting this prelude of thy glory.

In the meantime they are prepared for the distressful scenes about to follow—"Let these sayings sink down into your ears—for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men." Be not dismayed, nor shaken in your faith, when you see your Master betrayed, tormented, basely and sacrilegiously murdered. Let not your hearts be troubled—ye believe in God—believe also in me. Ye have seen a portion of my glory—be not discouraged or offended when ye shall be once more selected from your brethren to witness mine

agony. In that awful, that tremendous moment, remember the bright vision on Mount Tabor.

And can we then be ignorant, O Savior, of the proper object of our hopes and desires? Can we return to earth, after these sublime meditations, without the most ardent aspirations after that heaven which we have seen foreshadowed? There we shall be admitted to the participation of thy blessedness—we shall be received into the city of the living God, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to thee our gracious Redeemer, who sittest on the throne of thy co-eternal Father. How can we be attached to the delusions of the world, how can we dote on the misery of this fading life, and not rather fly up to the felicity of saints, to the society of angels, to that blessed contemplation, when we shall see God in himself, God in us, ourselves in Him? There shall be no sorrow, no complaint, no fear, no death. There no malice shall rise against us, no misery afflict us, no hunger, thirst, weariness, painfulness, temptation, shall set themselves in array against us. There shall be rest from our labors, peace from our enemies, freedom from our sins. How many clouds of anxiety darken the sunshine of our joy while we remain here below! Complaint of evils past, sense of present, apprehension of future, share our lives amongst them. But there shall we be always joyful, always beholding the presence of Him who hath purchased and prepared for us this unutterable glory.

Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. O my soul, is there a heaven? is there a Savior? is there pure and perfect felicity under the shadow of his wings? Lift up thine eyes to the everlasting hills—contemn the specious offers of the world—acknowledge its misery and mutability—and fixing thy thoughts on the regions of eternal bliss, exclaim, *Lord, it is good for us to be there!*



## 81.—THE LUNATIC HEALED.

Wherefore, O Lord, when thou didst return from the scene of thy glorious transfiguration, were the people greatly amazed? Why did they fly to thee with eager impatience? Why salute thee with more than common veneration? Was it not, that some remains of glory overshadowed thy countenance? Was it not that the form which veiled thy divinity bore testimony to thy celestial origin!—that like thy great forerunner, with whom thou hadst been discoursing, when thou camest down from the mount, thy face shone with more than mortal radiance? Thou couldst not altogether, and in a moment, divest thyself of thy splendor. When the great luminary of heaven has finished his daily course, the eye still fixes itself with admiration on the vivid colors of the twilight.

While our Savior was transfigured on Mount Tabor, his disciples who remained in the valley had been in a state of perplexity and distress. Three of his followers were with him on those heights, transported with joy at the miraculous proofs of his Godhead—the rest were attempting, but in vain, to deliver a miserable demoniac from tormenting frenzy.

Much people had assembled to attend on Christ, and they will not depart till he is come down from the mountain. Their patient assiduity detained them on the spot whither their zeal and devotion had originally led them. We are not worthy the name of his servants, if we do not diligently seek the face of our Master, and wait for his salvation.

After his retirement from the world, to hold converse with his eternal Father, and to receive the homage of Moses and Elias, he returns into the plain to the multitude. He had been called apart for a season, to prayer

and contemplation—now he brings the gifts of healing, and imparts his divine instructions to the people. The ministers and stewards of his mysteries may learn their duty from the example of their Lord—they must either be preparing themselves, or seeking the conversion of others—one while in meditation, afterwards in action—alone, to study; in the assembly to preach. They must give attention to “*reading* as well as to exhortation and doctrine.”

Moses, when he came down from the mount, heard the shouts of idolatry in the valley—Christ is assailed by the noise of tumultuous discord. The scribes were engaged in vehement controversy with his disciples—they saw the Master absent, they saw a part of his train left behind, and they esteem this a proper moment for their assaults. The children of darkness avail themselves of all advantages; still do they direct their weapons at the most defenceless. If we are for a moment removed from Him whom our soul loveth, we are buffeted with powerful temptations.

Our Savior, while yet on the mount, well knew what was passing in the valley—he hastens to the support of his disciples. As the darkness flies before the dawn, as the cloudy vapor is dispelled by the sunbeam, so do these cavils vanish at the presence of Christ. Never was it more conspicuous than at this moment, that mankind in beholding him saw the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. Instead of opposition, they are on their knees—here are now no quarrels, but humble salutations—malice, envy, prejudice itself is hushed in silent awe.

The solemn pause is interrupted by the earnest supplications of an afflicted parent. He had in vain applied to the disciples, whose inability to afford him relief had doubtless exposed them to the scorn and sarcasms of the envious scribes. He now, with better hope of success, casts himself at the feet of Jesus. Whom will not

sorrow make both humble and eloquent? The case was a case of more than common distress; and it was described accordingly. The child is lunatic—and that not merely from natural disorder, but from the possession of a cruel and merciless spirit which vexed him with incessant torture—a spirit which, triumphing in successful malignity, yielded not to the power of the servants of Christ. “I besought thy disciples to cast him out, and they could not—therefore, Lord, have *thou* mercy on my son.” Despair of other help sends us immediately to the God of our salvation. Here only was the parent’s refuge. The “strong man armed” had seized on his child—none but a stronger than he could dispossess him. O God, spiritual wickednesses are ever ready to invade our souls—all human help is insufficient—thy mercy, combined with thy power, can alone effect our deliverance.

Who can listen, without shuddering to this tale of wo, to the recital of sufferings like these? Frenzy has taken possession of this miserable youth—its fury is seconded by the malignant spirit, which at one time bereaves him of his intellect, at another restores it, to his torment—at one time exhibits him a fearful spectacle of raging madness, foaming and gnashing his teeth—at another, languishing and pining away in melancholy dejection—casts him, sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water—(but rather for torture than dispatch—it was too much mercy to let him die at once)—rejoices in the complicated mischief which he had brought on the creature of God. O Savior, what enemies have we to encounter! how unequal are we to the conflict, without thy gracious aid! Blessed be that triumph of thine, which deprived the principalities and powers of darkness of their usurped dominion, and brought light and salvation to thy people!

Who can listen without shuddering to this tale of

wo? But shall we be insensible of those still more grievous miseries wherewith Satan endeavors to overwhelm our souls? Lo, he seeks to cast us into that fire whose everlasting burnings know no intermission—to distract and torture us with inordinate cares and sorrows—to make us rave, with ineffectual struggles, at the afflicting hand of God—or pine and languish in a state of spiritual decay, the victims of misery and despair.

The unhappy father had not neglected the means of his son's recovery—he had brought him to the disciples of Christ, not as seeking them, but their Master. In the mysterious absence of Christ he sought for his remedy at their hands. Often had they prevailed over the spirits of disobedience—often had they exultingly declared, “Lord, even the devils are subject to us by thy word.” With a degree of confidence therefore had the suppliant addressed them—and now how does his heart sink within him when he finds that his hope is frustrated? “They could not cast him out.” No doubt the disciples laid their wonted charge on this stubborn spirit—that charge which hitherto had never been without its efficacy. With the utmost grief and consternation they behold themselves baffled and overpowered, even in the presence of their insulting enemies. Scarcely was the father of the demoniac more troubled at this event than themselves. Perhaps they feared that their Master had (with himself) withdrawn that power which he had commissioned them to exercise. They knew not the purpose of his departure, or the time of his return. Was he ascended into the heavens like the prophet of old, and had he forborne to leave a portion of his spirit upon his followers?

When Moses went up into the mount, the faith and piety of the Israelites vanished with their guide. The followers of Christ were not thus unmindful of their duty—but the God whom they served would nevertheless make them remember his own supremacy. He is no less

glorified in our disappointment than in our success. If his graces were always at our command, they would seem naturally our own, and would excite a far less degree of gratitude to their Author—now we are justly held in an awful dependance on that gracious hand, which gives, but excites not vanity—denies, but leads not to despair.

The father of the demoniac complains not of the disciples' inability to help—it had been injurious to have considered as a crime what they felt that they could not do. In his address to our Lord he merely alleges the stubbornness, and laments the invincible obstinacy of that evil spirit.

And will not a compassionate Savior extend his accustomed mercy to this afflicted parent and his miserable child? Will not that gracious voice speak comfort to the troubled soul, and mitigate those heart-rending sorrows? Alas, what do we hear?—"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" O Savior, a bruised reed thou wouldst not break—thou wouldst not add more sorrow to a heart that was grieved—the cavils of thy malignant enemies, cavils too eagerly listened to by the impatience of sorrow, occasion these expressions of just displeasure.

But soon shall that faith be revived which the suggestion of infidelity had caused to droop—he who had for a time been tempted to despair, shall suddenly be awakened to joyful hope—"Bring thy son hither—if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

What a happy change is here! "How long shall I suffer you?—Bring him hither to me." The one is a word of anger, the other of favor: his indignation does not impede his heavenly goodness. In the midst of judgment he remembers, he exercises mercy—his sun shineth in the midst of the storm. Whether he smile or frown, it is all for one purpose, that he may support the weak and con-

vince the disobedient. O blessed Savior, whither should thy ministers direct the power which thou hast given them but to edification, and not to destruction? They are physicians—they are not executioners: they give medicines to heal, not poisons to kill. Till that day when an all-righteous Judge shall say to the wicked, "Depart from me," it is the office of his ambassadors to invite them with tender entreaties to the participation of mercy.

Already have these coals of fire melted the heart of this anxious suppliant. Tears of penitential sorrow burst from his eyes—"Lord, I believe—help thou mine unbelief. Pity and forgive a wretched father, whom excess of misery has betrayed into a momentary distrust—let not my infirmities prevent the restoration of my child. O gracious and holy prophet, visit not my faults on him!"

The youth is brought into the midst, that the scribes themselves might witness both the conflict and the victory—the devil is rebuked, and driven out—that powerful spirit which would not obey the commands of the disciples, stoops to the voice of the Master—the almighty *Word* which in the beginning cast him out of heaven, can easily remove him from an earthly tabernacle. If the Lord rebuke thee, Satan, how canst thou do otherwise than flee?

The disciples, troubled at their own want of success, anxiously inquire its reason: little imagining that they should hear their unbelief assigned as the cause of their disappointment. Had they not been deficient in faith, they had not been deficient in power. Meanwhile they must pray to God that they may have the victory—they must fast, to make this prayer more effectual. We cannot now command—but we can fast and pray. Our God hath not withdrawn from his servants the means of quenching the fiery darts of the wicked. If we are invested with christian armor, Jehovah will fight for us—Satan cannot prevail against us.

## 82.—BETHESDA.

In the various actions of his life, our blessed Savior was an example not only of moral virtue, but of religious obedience. The law enjoined every Hebrew to present himself three times in the year before the Lord. Though, as a Son, he might have pleaded exemption from this tribute of service, he would not omit one of those ceremonies which himself had enjoined. Thus did it become him to fulfil all righteousness, whatever dangers might attend on the exercise of his duty. He had been constrained to depart from Jerusalem, through the malice of those enemies who sought his life, ere he had yet accomplished the work of Him that sent him—he now returns, unappalled by every danger, regardless of all the fury of his adversaries—"In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God—yea, thy law is within my heart."

O Lord, how wonderful are thy works, whether performed in the ordinary course of thy providence, or by the immediate interference of thine almighty power, or by the ministry of thy holy angels! Every where we find just cause of astonishment, just subject of adoration. In particular, how didst thou vouchsafe to display thy miracles to thy peculiar people, notwithstanding their blindness and apostacy! If thou hadst not done among them works which no other nation beheld—if thou hadst not revealed thyself to them in a manner which no other nation ever experienced, they had not exhibited such a fearful example of obduracy and ingratitude. Now "have they both seen and hated both thee and thy Father"—although the works which were wrought among them bore such witness to the truth—although the demonstrations of thy power were such as called for universal conviction from mankind.

The miraculous waters of Bethesda fixed on their brink a multitude of sufferers. There, in anxious expectation, they waited for that moment which should bring comfort to one, disappointment to multitudes. When the troubled state of the waters announced that the heavenly visitant had bestowed on them their medicinal virtue, these jealous competitors rushed forward with eager impatience, in hope of that gift of healing which awaited him who first plunged himself into the stream. Blessed Lord, how vast, how unlimited are those mercies which the bringing in of a better hope secured to thy creatures! The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto *all men*. "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely. In my Father's house are many mansions. Come unto me, *all ye* that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Among these companions in misery, our Savior beholds a wretched man, who for eight-and-thirty years had supported life under circumstances which seemed to render it an almost intolerable burden. Alas, what called this unhappy sufferer to the waters of Bethesda? What reasonable ground of expectation could he possibly entertain that his endeavors would be crowned with success, in a trial which depended on personal speed and activity? Others, affected in a different manner, must necessarily have the preference. Vain must be the attempts of one, bowed down to the earth by painful infirmity, to outstrip his fellows. Yet still does he persist—still does the energy of hope teach him to remain at that spot where alone he deemed a *possibility* of cure to be expected. He persists, and continues his anxious labor—each returning season bringing along with it fresh hopes and fresh disappointment.

O ye that are afflicted with spiritual diseases, come to that living fountain which is opened for sin and for



uncleanness. Approach the well-spring of life—those never-failing streams whose virtues are not temporary, whose blessings are not confined to one competitor—where every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and none who apply with faith are sent empty and despairing away. Do ye complain of the blindness of your ignorance? Here shall ye receive clearness of sight—Of the infirmity of your best resolutions? here ye shall obtain a fresh supply of grace—Of the tumultuous frenzy of passion? here is peace to the troubled soul—Of the cold and withered languor of your zeal and piety? here is life, and strength, and activity freely offered to your acceptance. Whatsoever sickness, whatsoever danger, whatsoever sorrow there be, come to your Savior, and be healed.

Yet even here, as at Bethesda, the God of all hope will exercise the patience of his servants. He will have us sensible of the value of those blessings we solicit, that when they are imparted to us we may both enjoy them and praise his mercy the more. How enviously did these sufferers at the medicinal stream look on each other as rivals! How did they watch, and suspect, and scrutinize, and struggle for a preference! How, like the jealous candidates for earthly honors, did they esteem their expectation itself to be misery, and their disappointment torture! But he who commits his way unto the Lord must hope for those gifts which he bestows at his own time, and in such a manner as is good in his sight. O that men would thus tarry at the true Bethesda, the house of the Father of mercies and of all comfort—O that men would “wait for thy loving-kindness, O Lord, in the midst of thy temple!” Did they diligently attend thine ordinances, did they value their own happiness aright, they could not fail of those blessings which thou hast covenanted to bestow. Alas, here, and here only, are they faint, remiss and indolent! If their temporal

welfare is to be consulted, they tarry long, and endure patiently, and toil, that they may toil yet longer; submitting to certain misery for the sake of a few uncertain days of happiness. Why is it not thus with the soul? The wretched patient at Bethesda, without even the probable means of support or comfort, would yet attempt, yet labor to attain the object of his wishes. And can we not, blessed Lord, can we not then be equally solicitous to accomplish the work of our salvation? Can we not be as ardent in our endeavors for our spiritual recovery? What can be more important—what of nearer moment—what better deserving our most animated exertions, than the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

Our Savior when he beheld this child of sorrow, when in accents of loving-kindness and tender mercy he spoke as one that was touched with the feeling of his infirmity, did not ask the question without effect. He did not kindle the spark of hope in the sufferer's breast, to check it by subsequent despair. Christ, the power of God, said unto the sick man "*Arise*"—and he arose.

And wilt thou then, O *sinner*, be made whole? Look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, and thou shalt be saved. Though thou art bowed down to the earth with infirmity, stooping under thy grievous burden—though thy sin hath taken hold on thee, that thou art not able to look up, depriving thee of that privilege which the most high God bestowed on man at his creation—turn not a deaf ear to that gracious voice. Be not too hasty in pronouncing thyself free from all spiritual sickness, when it may be that the deadly contagion is making rapid advances to thine heart. Say not, "there is peace and safety," while thou art encompassed about with an host of enemies. What hast thou to do with peace, so long as the sorceries of sin prevail against thee, and her witchcrafts are so many?

How dear to human nature is the breath of life! how

strongly has the Author of our being attached us to existence, though accompanied with every circumstance of pain and misery! O Savior, if that life which *must* ere long be succeeded by death is thus precious to us, how precious, how inestimable is that life which thou hast purchased for us, the inheritance of eternal glory in thine heavenly kingdom! No grief, no pain approaches to affect those unsullied joys which are to be found in thy presence. We embrace, O Lord, we hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, given unto us by thee!

But who shall presume to dictate to the Almighty the precise time or manner in which he shall work our deliverance? The sufferer before us is not healed by those miraculous waters to which alone he looked for his recovery. Relief and salvation are afforded him in another and still brighter form. Shall we despair of attaining those heavenly gifts after which we are permitted to aspire? Shall we be petulantly impatient, or as petulantly despairing? Know we not that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience—and experience hope—and that hope maketh not ashamed? Though the blessing be for a while delayed—though spiritual comfort may not be afforded at the moment when our solicitude would expect it, yet shall it surely come, and shall not tarry beyond its appointed time. What God hath promised, he is both able and willing to perform. If our earlier days have been visited with every species of distress—if our souls and bodies have been brought low unto the earth, yet the clouds which overcast the meridian of our life may disappear towards its evening, and our sun may go down in brightness and serenity.

O Savior, thou art no longer conversant in person with mankind. Thou art returned to the participation of that ineffable glory wherewith thou wert invested “before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made.” But art thou not still present, in

thy holy word, in thy Divine ordinances? There dost thou yet call to us—there dost thou address thy suffering children with the same mercy and the same power that called the languishing sufferer at Bethesda from sorrow to joy, from weakness to strength, from anguish of heart to transports of gratitude. Wherefore then shouldst thou be afraid, O my soul, in the day of adversity? Why do fearfulness and trembling come upon thee, and an horrible dread overwhelm thee? wait thou only upon God—be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart—put thou thy trust in the Lord.



### 83.—THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

The life of Christ was a life of incessant labor. In the day he was in the temple—in the night in the mount of Olives. His retirement was for prayer—his public appearance was for preaching. The multitude were yet divided in their sentiments. While some believed his word, there were too many on whom no impression had been made by the repeated demonstrations of his omnipotence. Among the scribes and Pharisees in particular all was malice and hostility. Messengers were sent and suborned to apprehend him; nevertheless he returned to the temple. Lord, thine example teaches us no less than thy precepts. It is for indolence or fear to be discouraged by opposition. When God calleth, we must overlook and contemn the displeasure of men. After a scanty harvest we must sow—in spite of the fury of our adversaries, we must yet “speak in God’s behalf.”

The auditors of Christ, though with different purposes of heart, are numerous and attentive. The people come to learn—the rulers to cavil and murmur at his doctrine.

Meanwhile a company of Pharisees present themselves before him, under a pretence of zeal for justice and scrupulous regard to virtue. As lovers of chastity and haters of licentiousness, they bring to him a woman convicted of the heinous crime of adultery. They have recourse to our Savior's authority, which on other occasions they impiously disregarded, that from his exercise of it they might find a new subject of accusation.

The wretched criminal, standing in the midst of an indignant multitude, awaits her sentence with all the horror and consternation of guilt. Her zealous accusers begin their plausible charge. Their own complicated wickedness they imagine undetected—that they keep secret among themselves, every man in the deep of his heart. Little did they think that the moment was near approaching when their own conscience should rebuke them more than a thousand witnesses, and the voice of God more than a thousand consciences.

They who complain of the offence do not hesitate to point out the punishment. "Moses in the law commanded that such should be stoned—but what sayest thou?" If they are not sure that Moses said so, why do they affirm it? If otherwise, why do they question what they are aware is decided? It was their accustomed boast, "We are Moses' disciples—we know that God spake by Moses." Gladly would they lead our Savior to contradict their great legislator, that they might take advantage of his contradiction. It is the common endeavor of the enemies of truth to set the law in opposition to the Gospel; but they shall never be able to effect it by all the sophistry of malice. God hath joined them together—man cannot put them asunder. They are firm and indissoluble associates: each speaks for the other, each establishes the other. Moses was faithful as a servant—Christ, as a Son. The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ—He came not to destroy, but to fulfil. While

by him, and him only, all that believe are justified, the law is nevertheless holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Even now must we adhere to the *moral* law, if we would have our part in the bringing in of a better hope. So shall Moses lead us to Christ, and Christ to glory.

Had the Pharisees proposed this question with an honest heart, in sincere desire of information, the reference had been wise and laudable. Whither should we have recourse, O Lord, but to thee, the Word of thy Father, the teacher of thy Church? But here it was far otherwise. They came not to learn, but to tempt—and to tempt, that they might accuse. They had remarked our Savior's readiness to annul those false comments which their presumptuous scribes had added to the law. They had seen his gracious and merciful disposition leading him on some occasions to acts which their scrupulous bigotry deemed *contrary* to the law. He had touched a leper—had healed on the Sabbath—had selected for his disciples two acknowledged publicans. How shall he escape this artful stratagem? He must either second the decree of Moses, by sentencing this woman to death—or contradict that decree by dismissing her unpunished. If he command her to be stoned, he loses the honor of his mercy—if he pronounce her acquittal, he loses the honor of his justice. Take away either of these, and he can be no Savior.

O the folly of vain men, seeking to beguile wisdom itself! At first, silence and neglect shall confound them—at last, the word shall be spoken to their conviction. Our Savior stoops down, and, without vouchsafing an answer to these malicious and busy cavillers, with his finger he traces characters on the ground, as though he heard them not. While by this cautious procedure he avoided the snares which they had laid for him, he excited the more curiosity on their part, and led their eagerness into justly-deserved shame.

The more reluctance they observed in Christ, the more do they press him with wearisome importunity. At length compelled to speak, he raises himself; and since their vehemence will not bear denial, gives them such an answer as they little expected to hear. "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* There is not one of you but is as guilty as she whom you accuse. But your crimes are veiled in secrecy, hers are brought forth to light. You have more need to make your own peace by repentance, than to urge severity against another. If death be her due, let not the sentence be executed by those unhallowed hands—your hearts know that ye are worthy, not to *inflict*, but to *suffer* punishment."

What do we hear? These scribes and Pharisees were noted for their extraordinary and unexampled holiness—their demeanor was not merely inoffensive, but sanctified and austere—yet that all-seeing eye hath discovered latent wickedness in these specious professors. What secret is there, which our God searcheth not out? Though we retire into the deepest concealment, his power follows us—he observes all our actions—no bolts, no darkness can bring security—how then can we dare to offend? Those crimes which from length of time are forgotten even by ourselves, are held in remembrance before God. Fearfully shall he recall them to our memory, and shall make us possess the sins of our youth. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

O wonderful transition from arrogance to remorse! When the Pharisees hear the voice of Christ, hypocrisy itself is thunderstruck, and malice can maintain the contest no longer. These zealous asserters of the law, ashamed, self-convicted, "went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last." A man can no

more resist the stings of conscience than he can resist the power of God. He who placed it in our bosom, directs it to accuse—there is no denial when we are thus declared guilty. If our heart condemn us, in vain are we acquitted by the world. No wicked man needs to seek out of himself for a judge, an accuser, a witness, a tormentor.

No sooner do these hypocrites hear of their offences from the mouth of Christ, than they are gone—had they been struck with true remorse, they would rather have fallen upon their knees and said, “Lord, we know and feel that thou canst trace our most secret sins—this argues thy divine omniscience. Thou art able to discern our faults, art able also to remit them on our repentance. O pardon the iniquity of thy servants—thou hast accused, do thou also absolve!” But an obdurate man can neither bear the mention of his sins, nor the presence of his Savior. The Pharisees turn their backs on the heavenly monitor and flee. Thou blind Pharisee, couldst thou as easily flee from the wrath, and from the vengeance of God, there would be at least some shadow of excuse for thy departure—but while in him we live, and move, and have our being, what doest thou? whither goest thou? Thou mayest banish thyself from his mercy—from his judgments thou canst not escape.

Jesus is left alone. His perfect and spotless innocence, which knew no sin, shrinks not from the test proposed by himself. The word was addressed to the scribes and Pharisees; they departed in guilty consternation from the temple. There yet stood the wretched adulteress. She might have retired, like her accusers—none constrained her stay—but that which sent them away, riveted her to the spot, *Conscience*. She knew that her transgression was publicly denounced, and could not be denied even by herself—fastened there by her **own** bleeding heart, she awaits her doom in trembling.



No sooner had our Savior put to silence the vaunts of his hypocritical opponents, than he returned to his first gesture of seeming inadvertency—"again he stooped down and wrote on the ground." He now lifts up himself, and as though he had not been aware of the consequences of his own decision, says, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?"

O thou that art heavy laden with the insupportable burden of thy sins, whither shouldst thou betake thyself but to the presence of thy Savior? Couldst thou choose thine own refuge, to whom wouldst thou flee? Happy are they, who, when convinced of their miserable depravity, can at once betake themselves to that Judge, who is their Advocate, their Redeemer, their Surety, their Ransom, their Peace.

In a state of fluctuation between hope and fear, the criminal expected her decision—hope, in that her accusers were gone; fear, in that she knew what she had deserved at the hands of justice. Had sentence passed *legally*, He, who would not intrude on the office of others, would not have opposed others in the execution of those righteous decrees once delivered by himself. Now, under these unexpected circumstances, his heavenly mercy hath its perfect work. Not that he would palliate the enormity of guilt—not that he would pass over this flagrant offence by a too gentle reprimand. But he who once said, "Who made me a ruler and divider among you?" said also, "Neither do I condemn thee." He came, not to be an arbiter of civil causes, nor a judge of the criminal, but a Redeemer of mankind—he came, not to destroy the body, but to save the soul. Such was his care towards this miserable offender—"Go, and sin no more." How can we sufficiently magnify thy mercy, O blessed Lord, who, far from taking pleasure in the death of a sinner, so camest to save, that thou urgest our unkindness and ingratitude to thee in being miserable—"Why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

But, O thou Son of God, though thou wouldst not *then* be a Judge, thou wilt *hereafter* be. In thy first coming thou wouldst not enter into judgment with thy servants—at thy second advent a world shall stand before thy tribunal. Thou shalt come in the glory of thy Father, with thy holy angels, and shalt judge every man according to his works. That we may not hear thy terrible voice speaking unto us, “Depart, ye cursed,” let us now hear thy voice of mercy, “Go, and sin no more.”



#### 84.—THE THANKFUL PENITENT.

The Pharisees were universally known to be the proud enemies of Christ—men intoxicated with their own fancied superiority—haughty and contemptuous toward others—severe in their manners, but hypocrites in heart—strict sectaries, but persons destitute of true and vital religion. Yet even among these some were found exempt from the general censure of “despising the counsel of God against themselves.” They could not only boast of Nicodemus and Gamaliel as their own, but could furnish another of their number, who was not so far blinded by prejudice as to be insensible of the honor and happiness derived from the presence of our Lord.

The Savior of mankind knew no mean and partial distinctions. Whether it were Pharisee or Publican who spake, his heart refused not their proffers of friendship and hospitality. Thus did his wisdom and mercy induce him to be all things to all men, that he might save the more. And shall we not, after thine example, O blessed Jesus, endeavor by all honest means to win the souls of mankind to thee? Shall we not strive to recover those

from the snare of the enemy who are taken captive by him at his will? How vain is that pride, or that prejudice, which leads us to stand aloof and sacrifice our charity, that we may avoid contamination! If we can, without endangering our own souls, impress on the hearts of sinners a sense of their duty, by exhibiting religion in its most amiable form, then do we walk in the steps of him who scrupled not to sit down to meat in the Pharisee's house.

While the Savior of the world was imparting his divine instructions, and suiting them to the capacity of his hearers, behold, "a woman that was a sinner" approached that threshold, where, but for the presence of Jesus, she had little to expect save the extreme of rigorous justice. They who valued themselves on their own righteousness could not but recoil from acknowledged guilt. What a sight was a *notorious* sinner to one who looked on the best of men as sinners, if not of the same persuasion as himself! Yet neither the known severity of the man, nor the probability of an unkind reception, can prevent her from seeking after the God of comfort. No disadvantage can deter the penitent soul from a speedy recourse to Christ. Were Jesus indeed amidst his disciples, were he among a multitude of the people, were he in the house of some humble Publican, she might have approached with less charge of presumption, with less danger of repulse—but every moment is precious to those who would be reconciled to God. Distress must not be too scrupulous—faith must not indulge ill-grounded fears. We are not worthy of the comfort of thy presence, O God of our salvation, if wheresoever we know thou art, we do not hasten thither to implore thy mercy.

The place was not more unpropitious than the time. The house of a Pharisee might seem as ill suited for a sinner as the tears of a penitent to the hour of festivity. "To every thing there is a season"—what could

be more discordant than sorrow in the midst of joy? Alas, these trifling considerations have no weight with an anxious soul which would make its peace with God. The heart which has felt the stings of remorse, and is earnestly desirous of pardon, can scarce delay the expression of what it feels, and cannot be confined to common terms and circumstances.

Whence then was this zeal, this fervency? Doubtless she had heard from the mouth of Christ, in his divine admonitions to the people, many gracious invitations to the troubled and afflicted soul. She had seen him amidst Publicans, amidst enemies; she had noted many acts of his transcendent mercy. Deep contrition is in her heart—the arrows of the Almighty are fixed there, and drink up her spirit. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Who is this that cometh, travelling in the greatness of his strength? Thou, Lord, that speakest in righteousness, mighty to save! She comes in and finds the Redeemer whom she sought—she comes, with the oblation of a penitent and grateful heart. The irregularity of her life had not erased from her mind those precepts which she had too frequently, too notoriously, transgressed. She could not but remember that none could appear before the Lord empty. To testify her reverential devotion, she brings an alabaster-box, pure and costly, fit for the reception of those precious odors, which she had prepared for the Savior of mankind.

The soul which is truly sensible of its sin, can think nothing too dear, too valuable, as an atonement, to make reconciliation with the offended Majesty of heaven. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God?" Micah, 6 : 6, 7. The repentant sinner begins with the tender of burnt-offerings and calves of a year old—thence he ascends to hecatombs—thousands of rams—ten thousand rivers of oil. Nay, he would be content, like the heroic patriarch, to

give his very first-born, the object of his fondest, tenderest affection, to expiate the sin of his soul. Any thing, every thing is too small a price for peace. O Savior, we bring thee the tribute of our humble obedience—all that we have, or are, we consecrate entirely to thee. What earthly retribution can compensate thine inestimable mercies? If we have devoted a portion of our days to sin, to vanity and folly, lo, we now turn unto thee with contrite hearts, and earnestly implore forgiveness. Teach us henceforth to employ all our time, all our abilities, to thy glory—weak and inadequate, alas, are our best endeavors to testify our sense of thy mercy and our own unworthiness!

The penitent, whose courage had induced her to venture into the presence of the Savior, dares not yet behold the beams of his awful countenance. She casts her dejected eyes to the earth, and will not so much as raise them to Him from whom she seeks commiseration. An humble diffidence is both a *token* and an *effect* of grace, “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? yea, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush—therefore they shall fall.” O God, could we but think how wretched we are by nature, how vile through our actual transgressions: how glorious, how sacred, how powerful thou art, before whom the brightest angels veil their faces, with what sentiments of fear and veneration should we approach thy majesty! What is man, who is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?

Behold here not only shame but sorrow—the heart which had been devoted to sin now melts with grief and contrition. Whence was this change but from the secret working of the Spirit of God? He smote the rock, and the waters gushed out. The feet of the Savior are bedewed with penitential tears. “Blessed are they that mourn—for they shall be comforted.” They have sown

in tears—they shall reap in joy; their just affliction and abhorrence of those sins which they have renounced, shall be graciously rewarded with a plenteous increase of happiness and glory.

Meanwhile not a word escapes from the mourner's lips. In the eloquence of silent grief she pours forth her soul before her God—every look, every gesture is vocal. The religion of the hypocrite is in his tongue, not in his heart—the true christian had rather give proof of his faith by his actions than his words; as well knowing that not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

The Pharisee saw all this; but with an evil eye—infidelity, instead of compassion, is excited in his soul. "If this man were a prophet he would have known what manner of woman this is that toucheth him—for she is a sinner." O Pharisee, how dost thou undervalue not only thy guest, but his weeping suppliant? A prophet? Yea, I say unto thee, and much more than a prophet. His omniscience not only is acquainted with the sorrows of a contrite heart, but even now reads what is passing in thine; while the humble penitent, no longer a sinner, but a convert, hath quenched the fiery darts of the wicked one by the tears of unfeigned remorse.

But why was it inconsistent with the knowledge or the holiness of the prophet to accept these demonstrations of grief and shame? How was the purity, the perfection of thy glorious guest impeached by this exercise of his mercy? "Behold" in him "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." How unjust, then, how ill-grounded is thy censure!

The Pharisee spake—but it was within himself. "Jesus answered." What we *think* we speak to our hearts, and we speak to One who hears us. The busy intruder may present itself, and be rejected with scorn—so far we are guiltless—but if we give it welcome, though we of-

fend neither in word nor action, the blasphemy of the heart, the murder of the heart, the adultery of the heart, shall be answered by the just indignation of God. Here the Savior of the world saw nothing but ignorance and simplicity, and he conveys reproof by gentle insinuation. By a short but interesting parable he opens the eyes of this blind Pharisee. Out of his own mouth he judges him; and proves to his conviction, that where there is greater mercy in the forgiveness, the love and gratitude of those who are pardoned are excited in a proportionate degree of ardor.

Then turning his face to the poor penitent, (as one who regarded a true humiliation for sin more than the highest vaunts of affected holiness,) he bestows on her that solemn absolution which she had asked with tears, but which her voice had not dared to implore. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." How did this gracious voice impart new life, new animation to her drooping spirit! Not more powerful was that word, when in the first confusion of universal nature God spake, "Let the earth bring forth grass"—when in a moment the face of creation assumed its new luxuriance—bursting forth into leaves, and buds, and blossoms, and fruits. When the ear heard thee, O Savior, then it blessed thee, and when the eye saw thee it gave witness unto thee. Her former tears said, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Those she now sheds say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord."

Seldom do we find so thorough a penitent—seldom so gracious a dismissal. Now does the Pharisee envy one whom he lately scorned. What can be wished by any mortal, but remission, safety, faith, peace! All here combine to make a contrite soul happy. Remission the ground of her safety—faith the ground of her peace. Salvation the consequence of her pardon—and the effect of righteousness, imputed through Christ, "quietness and assurance for ever."

## 85.—MARTHA AND MARY.

Our Savior was in his progress to Jerusalem, to some holy feast. His devotion neglected not any of those august solemnities which the great legislator of Israel had enjoined. In his way (assured of a grateful welcome) he turns aside to the village of Bethany. We have already seen him the guest of a contrite publican and of a rigid Pharisee—we now behold him under that roof where his benignant spirit partook of the delights of holy friendship. There dwelt the devout sisters of Lazarus, and their brother whom Jesus loved. O holy and blessed family, how should we envy your felicity were we not even now partakers of your high privilege! When we extend our charity and hospitality to one of the least of our brethren, we do it to our Savior—if he is an hungered we feed him—if he is thirsty we give him drink. Nay more—when our faith and piety hath its perfect work, we *abide* in him, and he in us. “If a man love me, he will keep my words—and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” Be it unto us, O Lord, according to thy word—enter in and abide with us, not for a limited time, but through the ages of eternity—satisfy our souls with thy presence—speak that gracious word, “This is my rest for ever—here will I dwell!”

No sooner is Jesus within the friendly mansion of Lazarus than he begins to impart his heavenly instructions. How dear, how precious was every word that fell from those sacred lips! Every moment he accounted as lost, wherein he promoted not the salvation of mankind. “My meat and drink is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work.” How should they who are ordained to be ministers of the word of life follow this illustrious example! How should they who are appoint



ed as lights in the christian world, dispense without intermission the beams of heavenly truth—instant, at every season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all diligence and care!

Domestic avocations occupy one of the sisters of Lazarus—the other remains at the feet of Jesus, in humble and submissive attention to his heavenly doctrines. The one was desirous to express her thankfulness for the presence of so blessed a guest, by more than common solicitude for his entertainment—the other, in fixed composure, remains riveted, as it were, to the ground, unwilling to lose one accent of that voice which was able to make her wise unto salvation.

At length the anxiety of Martha for the welcome of her Savior leads her to complain to him of the neglect of Mary. In terms of eager expostulation she exclaims, “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?” She knew that as long as Jesus preached, Mary was fixed, as with chains of adamant, at his feet, unless his own interference dismissed her.

And does the sister of Lazarus then presume to dictate to the Lord of heaven and earth? to tax him with inattention and neglect? to prescribe to his infinite wisdom, instead of receiving directions from his mouth? Alas, how ready is our weakness, upon the slightest cause of discontent, to murmur against a good and gracious God, as if he neither heard our voice nor beheld our sorrows! If we groan on the bed of sickness, tormented with pain, and complaining of the wearisome nights of anguish, how ready are we to exclaim, “Lord, dost thou not care that we suffer?” If the church of Christ is in apparent danger—if our adversaries are the chief, and our enemies prosper—if they roar in the midst of the congregation, and set up their banners for tokens, immediately we cry out, “Lord, dost thou not care?” But be assured, O thou feeble and distrustful soul, that the more thou sufferest,

the more thou art in calamity, so much the more thou art loved and cared for. Never is God more truly a Father than when he visits thee with salutary correction. Thou knowest, Lord, the works, and the labor, and the patience of thy servants—we may be ignorant of thy counsels—we may not see the hand that chastises us—thou canst not but be gracious.

The devout Mary could not hear this complaint without a degree of sorrow and astonishment. She could not but think, "If I have offended, why was I not admonished less publicly? If I have omitted any duty of practical religion while absorbed in these heavenly meditations, why must I be reprov'd in the presence of my Savior and his disciples? Lord, dost thou not care that I am injuriously censured?" But her devout spirit was too well versed in the faith of Christ to engage in angry controversy. Not a word escapes her lips. In silence and meekness she hears the accusation of her sister. Martha blames her for her piety—the disciples afterwards blame her for her bounty, (John, 12 : 3)—still does she possess her soul in patience. "Grievous words stir up anger—therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with." She is slow to speak, slow to wrath—committing her vindication to Him who is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

What need had she to plead for herself when she had such an Advocate? Doubtless Martha had entertained the thought that her sister would be dismissed with rebuke, herself with thanks. Now her expectations fail: and though she be not directly reprov'd, she hears the just tribute of preference bestowed on Mary—"Thou art careful and troubled about many things—but one thing is needful." Our Savior was not insensible of the courtesy which sought to give him grateful welcome—but he will not overlook her errors, or justify her weak misapprehensions. No obligation should so far weigh

with us, as to prevent us from discovering and reprov-  
ing the faults of those we love. Those are base and ser-  
vile spirits which refuse to utter a word in due season.  
“ Admonish thy friend—it may be he hath not done it—  
or if he hath, that he do it not again.” In some degree,  
our care must necessarily extend to earthly things. Reli-  
gion is not confined to duties merely speculative; nor  
must we be so far lost in contemplations, however sub-  
lime, as to forget those concerns which belong to this  
our state of warfare, till our change come. He that pro-  
vides not for his own, and specially for those of his own  
household, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an in-  
fidel. But our care must be free from distraction, free  
from distrust—from distraction, that it interfere not with  
the due exercise of piety and charity—from distrust, that  
while we use our best endeavors, we may still rely up-  
on the providence of God.

How different from this care is that of the worldling !  
God is not in all his thoughts—Christ dwelling not in his  
heart by faith. One man finds perplexity and trouble in  
his estates—another labors to aggrandize his family—an-  
other is deprived of present happiness by fears of a re-  
verse, revolving in his anxious mind the precarious con-  
dition of all things, and opposing his fears to his hopes—  
another studies how to escape (perhaps how to retaliate)  
the machinations of his enemies. O ye children of men,  
why are ye thus careful and troubled about many things ?  
why do ye impose on yourselves these unnecessary bur-  
dens, so grievous to be borne ? why do ye groan under  
a weight, from which the kind Providence of God hath  
offered to relieve you ? Hath not he commanded you to  
cast all your cares upon him, promising that he will make  
you the objects of his care ? Why are ye not as ready  
to depend on your heavenly Father, as he is to exert his  
power and mercy in your behalf ?

While Martha is gently reprovèd for her sollicitude, her

sister is commended for her devotion. "One thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." One thing is needful—not as superseding the necessity of every thing else—but as asserting its just claim to pre-eminence. Earthly duties must not set aside those of a spiritual nature. If without attention to the former we cannot live temporally, without regard to the latter we cannot live eternally. Both are necessary in their degree—but the last is most highly momentous. There is no opposition between these, but a just subordination. The body and soul should be friends, not rivals: the christian should remember that he is a man—the man, that he is a christian.

O blind and senseless vanity, which, neglecting that one thing necessary, affects so many things superfluous—which considers nothing as needless but that which is indeed of the utmost importance—which loses an inestimable treasure it knows not how to value, while it cares unduly for the fleeting and unreal pageantry of a transitory world!

The freedom of our will remains inviolate, though the grace of God alone bringeth salvation. "Mary hath *chosen* the good part"—there is no force, no compulsion—all is voluntary choice. Good and evil are set before us—we are in possession of perfect freedom, through the mercy of him who hath set us free. We are called to christian liberty; happy are we, if we can improve it to the benefit of our souls!

The stability and perpetuity of good adds much to its value. What Mary chose shall not be taken away from her. The act of her hearing was transient, the fruit was permanent. What she now receives into her ear, is grafted inwardly on her heart, and shall remain there for ever.

What couldst thou hear, O Mary, from those sacred lips which we hear not still? That heavenly doctrine is

ever the same; not more subject to change than the Author of it. Its benefit and virtue are as inseparable from our souls as the souls of the faithful from God. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever: and this is that word which by the Gospel is preached unto us. In the tempest of affliction, in the night of sorrow, it shall adhere steadfastly to us; and till death, in death, after death, shall make us happy.



### 86.—THE BLIND BEGGAR CURED.

“Jesus passing by, saw a man which was blind from his birth.” The case of such a sufferer required not merely art but power—a power no less than infinite, no less than divine. Nature presupposes matter, though without form—art looks for matter formed to our hands. God regards not either—his omnipotent word alone can create—he calleth those things which be not, as though they were. Great is the Lord, and great is his power, yea, and his wisdom is infinite. Such as this object of compassion appeared to our Savior, such are we with respect to all spiritual things. We want not only sight, but eyes—it is his grace and mercy which makes us capable of receiving illumination.

The blind man sat *begging*—he must be indebted for relief to the charitable eyes of others. The poor, the sick, the desolate are cast upon our mercy. Happy are we, if we can supply the place of limbs and senses to the needy, if we can be ministers of God to them for good. When the hour of adversity comes upon us, light will arise in the midst of darkness, if we can indulge the grateful reflection that we have been eyes to the blind

and feet to the lame—that we have delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him—that the blessing of them that were ready to perish came upon us—that we caused the widow's heart to sing for joy!

Where should he seek for pity and relief but at the gate of the temple? True piety and true charity are inseparable—they are twin stars which shine not singly on the soul. Then are we best disposed to mercy towards our brethren, when we come to implore the divine mercy towards ourselves. How can we refuse our mites, when we come to ask for talents?

Jesus passed by; but his eye was fixed on the helpless sufferer. His goodness anticipates our solicitations—he knows our necessities before we can express them—he gives us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask. With his accustomed mercy the Savior of mankind cast a gracious look on the dark and disconsolate object before him. If we suffered, and our God regarded not, we should indeed be the victims of despair—but his eyes are on the ways of men—their sorrows are all in his sight. O Savior, why should we not imitate thee in this thy charity? Wo to those eyes which can gaze only on beauty, magnificence and grandeur; and turn away with disdain from poverty and anguish!

The disciples as well as Christ behold the blind man, but with different impressions—"Master, who did *sin*, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The answer is direct and positive—there was a higher cause—the glory which would redound unto God by this demonstration of mercy. The divine visitations are not all punishments—some are for our trial, our warning, or our reformation—all show forth the power, the justice and the goodness of God.

He who at first made man out of the clay, with clay

anoints the eyes of him that was born blind, and sends him to the pool of Siloam for the completion of his recovery. All things receive their virtue from divine institution. How could bread and wine strengthen and refresh the soul but for the blessing annexed to it from above? On this depends all their use and all their efficacy. Jordan can then heal the leper, and Siloam give light to the blind. "He went his way, and washed, and came, seeing."

O Lord, what were the thoughts of this object of thy compassion when his eyes were now first given him! Into what a world of wonders did he find himself transported! How did he gaze with admiration on the heavens and earth, the faces and shapes of all creatures, the varieties of colors around him, the cheerfulness of the light, the lively beams of the sun, the vast expanse of the air, the limpid transparency of the waters, the glorious ornaments of the temple, the stately palaces of Jerusalem! Every thing was full of delight, full of astonishment. With what sensations, O blessed Savior, will thine happy servants enter into the joy of their Lord! How will they be affected, when the darkness of mortality being done away, they shall behold thy presence in righteousness—when they shall be called on to witness the felicity of that other world, the exaltation of thy saints and angels—the majesty of thy throne—the incomprehensible brightness of thy glorious Godhead! O my soul, set thine affections on things above, not on things on the earth—accustom thy thoughts to a foretaste of that heaven to which they should aspire—keep it ever in remembrance, that the objects of earthly ambition have no value when compared with "that true glory which excelleth."

The beggar who had asked alms at the gate of the temple could not be unknown to the inhabitants of Jerusalem or of Judea—his own calamity, the place of his resort, the importunity of his requests, had made him

every way remarkable. Our Savior purposely made choice of such a subject for his miracle—one so poor, one known so publicly. The very doubts, the very inquiries of those who questioned his identity tended more to the confirmation of the truth. The Jews could not believe that he, who now looked on them with confidence and joy, was the wretched sufferer whom they had so lately seen in darkness and misery, till they obtained demonstration that prejudice itself was unable to gainsay or resist. The miracles of Christ caused a sensible alteration in men, not more in their own apprehension than in the judgment of others. Thus in the relief of our spiritual blindness, the whole habit of the man is changed. Before, the face was dark and gloomy—now it is full of light and cheerfulness, through the knowledge of God and the hope of heaven. Before, the heart was devoted to earthly things—now, the convert uses this world as not abusing it. Before, his thoughts and anxieties had reference only to his body, his estate, or the opinion of mankind—now, they regard the displeasure of God and the peril of his soul. If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*—old things are passed away—behold, all things are become new!

The subject of these doubts is himself eager to remove them—"I am he." He would not conceal from others the mercies he had experienced—he would not be so unjust, or so ungrateful, as to suppress the loving-kindness of God. We are not worthy, O Lord, of that light which thou hast shed abroad into our souls, if we do not seek to diffuse it among mankind. Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed and delivered from the hand of the enemy—let them laud him with their whole heart—let them show forth all his marvellous works—let them declare his name among their brethren—let them proclaim his praises in the great congregation.

Man is ever inquisitive. We search studiously into



the wonders of the natural world—we delight in contemplating the elaborate inventions of art. No marvel, if, in a case transcending both art and nature, the utmost degree of curiosity was excited. A thirst after forbidden knowledge once cost us dear—but where it is good and lawful to be informed, a desire of information is commendable. “How were thine eyes opened?” Our ignorance can only be removed by impartial inquiry—if we make this inquiry from just motives, and in the spirit of meekness, we improve, as we ought, the first privilege of human reason.

He who had been so ready to declare himself the subject of the cure, is equally zealous to proclaim the author of it. “A man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed mine eyes, and said to me, *Go to the pool of Siloam and wash*—and I went and washed, and I received sight.” As yet his faith was not arrived at that pre-eminence which afterwards ranked him among the most illustrious professors of the truth. Hitherto he thought his benefactor a wonderful *man*, a mighty prophet—and soon from the principles of the doctrine of truth we behold him advancing to perfection—no longer a babe in righteousness, but growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. “Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Since the world began was it not heard that any *man* opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.”

Had the people who made inquiry into this astonishing fact heard it with unprejudiced ears, they could not but have listened with pious admiration, they could not but have declared their belief in so omnipotent an Agent—now, adverse to the blessed Jesus and partial to the Pharisees, they summon him that was once blind before

these implacable enemies of Christ. Unjust authority will not want some base and dastardly souls to soothe it in its tyrannous courses, though truth, and righteousness, and nature itself are made victims on its unhallowed altar. "*He is of age, ask him—let him speak for himself.*" These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews—for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that Jesus was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue."

Our Savior had performed this cure on the Sabbath. Never is charity unseasonable; never is it *more* seasonable than on that holy day devoted to a God of mercy. Yet even this can afford subject of accusation to the bigotted and scrupulous cavillers, who misconstrued the very wonders which proved the divinity of our Lord and deemed them impeachments of his holiness. "Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day."

We now find the man who once sat and begged, witnessing a good confession before the assembled Pharisees. We find him defending the gracious Author of his cure against the cavils of malignity and injustice. We see him, a resolute confessor, suffering excommunication for the name of Christ, and maintaining the innocence, the honor, the divinity of his benefactor—we hear him teaching the doctrines of truth to them who sat in the chair of Moses, and convicting them of blindness who punished him for seeing.

O blessed and zealous servant of thy Master, how valiant art thou for the faith of that God who helpeth them that are fallen—that God, who giveth sight to the blind! From thy state of poverty and wretchedness thou art exalted to be an advocate for thy Savior. Thy gain of bodily sight hath opened the eyes of thine understanding. Thou hast lost a synagogue and hast found the way to heaven. Thy father and thy mother forsake

thee—but the Lord taketh thee up. Thou art rejected by hypocritical sinners—thou art received with a gracious welcome by the God of glory.

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### 87.—THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE.

The time now drew nigh when the Author of our salvation should depart from the world and go unto the Father—he foreknew, and he had foretold, his death. Every moment seemed precious to those who had any favors to solicit either for themselves or others. Had the wife of Zebedee been as judicious with respect to the *subject* of her petition as she was with respect to the *time* of urging it, she had met with no reproof at the hands of her Redeemer. The suit is half obtained which is seasonably made—it was at the *departure* of the Angel that Jacob implored a blessing—the double portion of Elijah's spirit was not asked for till the moment of his ascending.

The misapprehension of this anxious mother must not be concealed—but her faith makes atonement for her error. While she hears Christ speak of his sufferings and death, she talks of his glory—while he points out his cross, she looks forward to his crown. Had she seen the elders of the Jews approaching our Savior with a submissive proffer of their allegiance—had she seen the usurper Herod, or the governors appointed by Cæsar, tendering to Christ the sceptre of his royal ancestor, the wisdom of this world would have been led to entertain the thought of his sovereignty. But, when the sound of ignominy, suffering and death was in her ears, then to request distinction and pre-eminence for her children in

the kingdom of Jesus, argues a degree of constancy no less deserving of wonder than of praise. When, in health and peace and prosperity, we talk of our trust in God, and our assurance of his favor, our professions are of little value—but if, in the hour of adversity and sorrow, we can believe, and hope, and rejoice, our piety is so much more noble as our difficulties are greater. Blessed was that servant who, when he sat in sackcloth and ashes, exclaimed with rapturous fervency, “I know that my Redemer liveth.”

The fond parent, whose zeal thus brought her to the feet of Jesus, knew not the extent and nature of her own request. Connected by near ties of consanguinity with his blessed mother—herself one of his most constant and diligent attendants from the earliest period of his mission—happy in the various distinctions conferred on her sons, she proffers her petition to the Lord of life without apprehending a refusal. She urges him not on her own behalf. Her fervent affection for her children teaches her to lay aside all selfish considerations, and to think of nothing but their future honor and advancement. It is only for her beloved offspring that the wife of Zebedee is ambitious.

Though our Lord had not where to lay his head—though he was despised and rejected among men—though he could not, without a miracle, pay the accustomed tribute, the devout matron pervades this veil of obscurity, and in the person of Him who made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, she acknowledges the Messiah the King of Glory.

Behold her in the lowest gesture of a suppliant, at the feet of her Lord. She signifies her desire that he would give effect to her wishes—but as yet she hesitates, and seems conscious of their impropriety. When our desires are not corrected by reason, we are afraid and ashamed to clothe them in language. The proud man sighs for

temporal honors—the covetous for wealth—the malicious for revenge on his enemies—the profligate for luxury and pleasure. But the prayer of faith and love approaches with boldness to the throne of mercy, assured of a favorable reception ; nor stands blushing without, as not daring to appear. When we know that our requests are holy, we cannot come with too much confidence into the presence of God.

He who knew the thoughts of this mother and of her sons, asks, (as if he had been a stranger to their purposes,) “What wouldst thou?” The suit is no longer delayed. Emboldened by the condescension of her Lord, the wife of Zebedee gives utterance to her thoughts—“Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, the other on the left, in thy kingdom!” O Lord, be it our ambition to lead a life of holiness, and to aspire after everlasting felicity—but as to *precedence* in celestial dignities, we do not, we dare not solicit it. Let us but enter into the joy of our Lord—and for the rest, “deal thou with us according to thy name: for sweet is thy mercy.”

The mother makes her request—the sons have the answer. “Ye know not what ye ask.” In his judgment on human actions, God ever has respect to the first mover, as well as to the instrument. Christ informs his erring disciples, that while faith is the ground of prayer, knowledge should accompany faith—that in our *ordinary* conversation an idle word is dangerous, but in our applications to heaven, if we understand not our own petitions, it is an aggravated fault—that if we come with requests that ought not to be made, we profane that name which we invoke.

To convince them of their unfitness for glory, they are told of their inability to suffer. “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Blessed Lord,

what cup was ever so full of bitterness as thine? The potion tendered thee by thine enemies, though mixed with vinegar and gall, what was it, when compared to that cup which could not pass from thee—which for our sake thou didst drink to the very dregs? And can we repine and murmur at our light afflictions, when we see thee, the Son of thy Father's love, thus acquainted with grief? We will endeavor, O Lord, we will endeavor, as far as our mortal weakness will permit, to walk in thy footsteps—we cannot be thine, if we partake not of thy cup—through much tribulation must we enter into the kingdom of God. In vain shall we expect to pass, by a sudden transition, from luxury and base indulgence to celestial glories. The path of vice is not that which leads to the throne of heaven. To follow our Savior through his sufferings to his rest and happiness is no easy, no trivial labor. If *they* were scarcely able to do it who had been so long blessed with his presence, informed by his doctrine, and, as it were, possessed of their heaven by anticipation in his society, how shall our feeble body, how shall our imperfect mind support the conflict? Blessed Savior, what can we do, what can we suffer without thee? If thy strength be not made perfect in our weakness, who shall be able to share thy bitter cup, thy painful baptism? Cover thou our heads in the day of battle—prepare us for our trials, enable us to sustain them—we can do all things through the aid of thine omnipotence.

Even holy men of God may be in an error as to their own degree of christian perfection. Out of an eager desire of honor the sons of Zebedee accept of the conditions—“*We are able.*” Alas, how different are sufferings in speculation and in practice! How near was that hour in its approach, wherein all the disciples, James and John among their number, forsook their Master and fled—forsook him in the moment when he was surround-

ed by his implacable enemies who thirsted for his life ! Nothing is more dangerous than to vaunt presumptuously of our own abilities—then are we more especially suffered to fall, that we may be “ashamed of this self-confident boasting.” O God, let us ever humble ourselves under a due sense of our own insufficiency—let us ascribe all glory to thee, and take nothing to ourselves but our infirmities !

O wonderful benignity of the Son of God ! He pities the weakness of his apostles, and neither inveighs against their ambition in asking, nor their presumptuous reliance on their own strength—he rather views their answer in its more favorable light, and omitting their errors, encourages their good intentions—“Ye shall drink indeed of my cup—ye shall be baptized with my baptism—but to sit on my right hand and on my left shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.” In what acts of condescension and love, O blessed Lord, hast thou expressed thy concession and thy denial ! Surely that which thou didst grant was equal in value to that which thou didst refuse. To be thus associated with thee was a dignity as great as that which the anxious mother solicited in vain. If we suffer with our Master we shall also reign with him. If we are faithful unto death, we shall obtain the crown of everlasting life.

Therefore, seeing we have received this ministry, as we have received mercy, let us faint not—but let us run with patience the race that is set before us—looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith—who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame : and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

## 88.—L A Z A R U S.

As the stream runs more widely the nearer it approaches to the ocean into which it flows, so doth the Savior of mankind work more powerfully as he draws nearer to his glory. The restoration of Lazarus from death was one of his last and of his greatest miracles—when he was himself about to die, he recalled his faithful servant from the tomb. Blessed Lord, none but an infinite power could so far go beyond nature as to revive one who had been four days dead—none but He who created man, could thus make him anew. The earth, from which thou didst raise his body—the invisible world, from which thou didst summon back his spirit, are equally under the control of thine omnipotence.

Sickness is the common prelude to death. No human being is exempt from this condition of our nature—neither youth, nor wisdom, nor holiness can avert the awful visitation. Lazarus, *whom Jesus loved*, is on the bed of languishing.

The anxiety of a fond sister is eager to have recourse to the assistance of her Savior in behalf of one so dear to them both. If his arm was ever ready to be stretched out to the relief of strangers, if his gracious voice brought comfort to the house of mourning when no especial cause moved him to show mercy—how surely might the power of that voice, that arm, be relied on in behalf of Lazarus! Doubtless Martha and Mary imagined that they had secured the recovery of their brother, when they sent unto Jesus saying, “Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick!”

Not a pang that was felt, not a groan that was uttered by Lazarus was unknown to our blessed Savior—yet this Lord of life suffers the friend so dear to him to sicken, and even to die, without approaching or seeming



to interpose in his behalf. Not that there was either inability, or disinclination to help—"this sickness," however outward appearances indicate the contrary, "is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." O Savior, thou didst usually call thyself by the humble appellation of "the Son of man," veiling thy Godhead under the garb of our mortal infirmity—but sometimes thou wouldst show the radiance of thy light, beaming through the clouds which surrounded thee. Thou wert near to thy passion. It was seasonable for Thee at this time to assert thy just title. Neither was this an act which thine human nature could challenge as its own, but one far transcending all finite powers. To die, was appointed to the Son of man—to raise from death and corruption, was the prerogative of the Son of God.

But wherefore, O Lord, wouldst thou be so long absent from thine afflicted servants? Wherefore, but to exalt the glory of thy miracle, to foreshadow thine own resurrection, to strengthen the faith of thy disciples! Hadst thou prevented the death of Lazarus, his recovery might have been deduced from natural causes—hadst thou arrived speedily after his decease, it might have been imagined that no positive separation had taken place between his soul and body—now, this period of time which elapsed makes his dissolution certain, and thy demonstration of almighty power decisive.

Our Savior, when he judged it seasonable, at length addressed his disciples—"Let us go into Judea again." He had retired from the tyranny of his persecutors, and from their murderous attempts to take away his life, because his hour was not fully come. Now, his love for Lazarus, and the care of his divine glory bring him thither once more, prepared for the utmost extremity of suffering. He calls his servants to share with him in those grievous trials. They cannot be his true disciples if

they will not take up the cross of their Lord. We must be careless of all danger when he summons us to the conflict. Whithersoever he bids us follow him, though snares and sorrows, and death are in the path, we must commend our spirits to his protection, and cheerfully obey his commandment—"Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Our Lord had formerly assured his disciples that the sickness of Lazarus was not fatal—he now will not at once acquaint them with the death of their companion, nor will he altogether conceal it. Shadowing it out under a figurative expression, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go to awaken him out of his sleep." O meek and merciful Savior, thou who thoughtest it no robbery to be equal with God didst not disdain to give the endearing title of friends to the children of men—"Henceforth I call you not servants—you are my *friends*, if ye do whatsoever I command you." O happy and honorable distinction, far exceeding all human desert, worthy of the most animated exertions of the christian to obtain and preserve! If God be for us, who can be against us? If he be our friend, what shall we fear, though evil men and evil spirits are enemies?

And dost thou, O Savior, describe the separation of soul and body under the gentle tranquil image of sleep? Thou, who art the great Lord of life and death, canst not be unacquainted with the nature of both. It is enough that thou hast said it—let not our fears or our infidelity mislead us—while thy wisdom hath implanted in thy creatures a natural and necessary love of life, thy mercy hath disarmed death of its most excruciating torment—thou hast made it an entrance into the joys of immortality—thou hast converted a merciless enemy into a salutary faithful friend. Who shall fear to take his rest by night, after the wearisome toils of the day? What can be so refreshing to the exhausted traveller as the comfort of

repose? Let us but be prepared by faith and repentance, and if he come "at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning," we shall be ready to meet the bridegroom. We will lay us down in peace, and sleep—for it is thou, Lord, only, that makest us to rest in safety.

Lord, from this sleep thy voice will awaken us, as it did thy Lazarus—"In our flesh shall we see God." The word which created can revive, can restore us—can command the soul to return to that body it once inhabited—can command the body to arise, incorruptible, immortal, and to re-unite itself to the soul. It is our comfort and security against the terrors of death, and the power of the grave, that our resurrection depends on the omnipotence and immutability of God.

Unwilling to return to Judea, the scene of past troubles and persecutions, the disciples are forward to embrace the words of their Master in a literal sense—*Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well*—If thou hast no other design in this perilous journey than the restoration of thy beloved Lazarus from his sickness, nature is already anticipating thy purpose. His sleep is an indication of speedy recovery—extremity of pain no longer deprives him of his rest—a grateful respite is given to his sufferings." Had our Savior only spoken of natural sleep, their argument had been plausible, though even then not absolutely conclusive—now, their misconstruction of the words of their master led them astray, so that "this saying was hidden from them, neither understood they the things which were spoken." Nothing can be more dangerous than to confine ourselves entirely to the letter, when we take into our hand the oracles of God—one error may draw on more; and though the first be never so slight, the last may be pregnant with the most fatal mischiefs to our souls.

Soon does our blessed Lord explain his meaning—

“Lazarus is dead: and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there—nevertheless, let us go to him.” Thus didst thou, O Savior, testify thine omniscience to thy disciples, that from thence they might form a just conclusion of thine almighty power. Thou didst not expressly declare that thou wert both able and willing to recall him from his grave—but if (while absent and at a distance) thou couldst speak with certainty of his dissolution, they could not but form the just inference, “We serve a Master who knows all things—and He who *knows* all things, can *do* all things.”

The absence of our Savior from the death-bed of Lazarus was not accidental, but voluntary. To the pious sisters of the departed christian it afforded nothing but present anguish—but the advantage which their faith would gain by so divine a miracle as followed, was more than able to counterbalance this momentary distress. The cause of their grief therefore is to our blessed Lord a subject of joy. When a father beholds his son fighting for his country, he sees danger and death on one side, renown and victory on the other—he grieves at the peril, but he rejoices in the honor. Thus doth the Almighty in all our sorrows—he hears our groans, he notes our tears, and pities us—but he looks upon our patience, our faith, our hope, our crown, and is glad that we are afflicted.

“Lazarus is *dead*—nevertheless, let us go to him.” What should separate, if death cannot? Friendship itself can but dismiss the lifeless remains to their tomb, attending them thither with pious sorrow, and committing them to their silent dust. But here is an unshaken Friend, whom the grave itself cannot sever from us—O love, stronger than death, love triumphant over corruption! Lord, even these our earthly tabernacles shall hereafter be members of that mystical body whereof thou art the Head. We “know that our Redeemer

liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after our skin, worms destroy this body, yet in our flesh shall we see God."

O Savior, death cannot hinder our approach to thee, or thy return to us. The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves shall hear thy voice, and shall go forth to meet thee. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust—for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out her dead. The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Sion with songs, and everlasting joy shall be on their heads—they shall obtain gladness and joy—and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

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89.—L A Z A R U S.—*continued.*

The news of Christ's approach seems to have awakened some degree of comfort in the sisters of Lazarus. Had he been present at an earlier period, the enemy would sooner have been vanquished. Death would have retired from so unequal a contest, and fled before the Lord of Life. The words of Martha, when she came forth to meet her Savior, are not the words of one who sorrowed without hope—"Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died—but I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Joy was wont to possess her soul at the arrival of so blessed a guest—she now receives him as one whose grief was sanctified by faith and piety. She as well as her sister had in time past sat at the feet of Jesus and heard his word—she knew that her brother would rise again in the resurrection at the last day. And when He whom God sent spake the words of God, "I am the

Resurrection and the Life—he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live,” she replied with rapturous fervency, “Yea, Lord—I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world.” In language worthy of the Holy Ghost which inspired it, (see 1 Corinthians, 12 : 3,) she bears testimony to the power and Godhead of the Messiah, and to the certainty of a future resurrection. This conference hath revived her drooping spirit—the consolations of God have raised her heart to the expectation of some wonderful event. Now therefore she hastens back to her sister, and endeavors to communicate to her a portion of her hope. She finds her, not alone, but surrounded by many sympathizing friends, who came from Jerusalem to join their tears with hers, and lament the death of Lazarus. Thus circumstanced, Martha dares not give utterance to the various feelings which agitate her soul. She will not make an open proclamation of the arrival of Jesus. The hostile edict of the Jews, (John, 11 : 57,) aimed at his liberty, if not his life, was doubtless the subject of public rumor. However well affected these persons might be to herself and her sister, either fear or prejudice might have rendered them unfit to be made acquainted with the presence of Christ. She speaks therefore *secretly* to Mary, “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.”

That word suspends all her sorrows. She forgets all other considerations. She suddenly departs from her assembled friends and hastens to the Redeemer of mankind. She departs—but not unattended. The zealous assiduity of those who shared her woes would not suffer them to remain inactive when they saw her rush forward, with eager haste, they knew not whither. Perhaps they dreaded some frantic paroxysm of grief—at least they were of opinion that she sought the dangerous indulgence of giving vent to her passionate lamentations

at the grave of her much-loved brother. If every surrounding object, while she remained in the house of mourning, brought with it a repetition of sorrow—if the scenes of their once happy society awakened every painful sensation, and caused fresh tears to flow—how would she be affected with insupportable anguish, were she rashly to intrude on the solemn mansions of the dead!

The friends of Mary mistook her errand. While they supposed that she was going to a dead brother, she repaired to a living Savior. The world, whether from jealousy or kindness, is too apt to misconstrue both the actions and the situation of the servants of God. They think them sorrowful, when in fact they are rejoicing—dying, when behold they live—having nothing, while they are possessing all things.

In the true gesture of a suppliant, Mary falls down at the feet of Jesus. Though in the presence of so many witnesses, some of whom were prejudiced beyond the reach of conviction (John, 11 : 46,)—though well aware that the homage she paid was forbidden by the tyranny of superstition—though no less than excommunication was denounced against all them who confessed him to be the Messiah—she prostrates herself and worships : while those bended knees and uplifted hands speak no less plainly than the accents of her sister, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of God!”

The passionate grief of Mary, the weeping of her surrounding friends, and above all, the cause of their sorrow, awaken our blessed Savior to the tenderest pity—“He groaned in his spirit, and was troubled.” He would no longer delay that manifestation of his power which should turn this heaviness into joy. But ere he can arrive at the place where those dear remains are deposited, his own example consecrates those tears, which are every way compatible with the most duteous resignation. Infidelity hardens the heart, and bids us, with

dry eyes and sullen apathy, submit to the evils of a rigorous destiny. The doctrine of Christ leaves us in full possession of those sensibilities which are an honor, not a disgrace to human nature. "Jesus wept."

The sepulchre of Lazarus was a cave, on the top of which a massy stone had been placed as a covering. He, who by the efficacy of his voice was about to raise the dead, will remove this obstacle by the ministry of other hands. Surrounded by busy and malignant enemies, he will so work as to give them no opportunity of cavilling, or charging him with collusion. The command to remove the stone is seconded by an act of omnipotent power—and the miraculous proof of his Godhead is so much the more wondered at as it was least expected.

We are all buried, O Savior, in the grave of our sins. The stone of obduracy must be taken away from our hearts before we shall attend to thy reviving voice—then shall it be heard, even in the region of corruption, and we shall not be exhorted in vain, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

The faith which had for a while led the sister of Lazarus even against hope to believe in hope, now seems to have withdrawn itself from her soul. Both her zealous professions and the gracious words of her Master are vanished and forgotten. Unwilling to disturb the sacred repose of death, she urges that the body of Lazarus, who had been dead four days, would be noisome and pestilential. Alas, how does the weakness of our mortal nature throw obstacles in the way of heavenly mercy, and oppose even that power which alone can rescue us. "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

They who were preparing to remove the stone, for a time refrained from their labor—one while fixing their eyes on Christ, one while on the sister of Lazarus, to



hear what would be the event of so important an objection. But soon are they given to understand, both by the words of our Savior and the dutiful acquiescence of his handmaid, that in spite of apparent difficulties and discouragements, the word of God must be obeyed. The stone is removed, and now they behold him dead whom they shall soon see revived. Every impediment is done away—all are in silent expectation—our Savior begins his miracle.

His eyes are raised to heaven—thence he derives his power—thence he expects and is assured of success. His tongue addresses the Almighty by the name of Father—that claim which his enemies judged to be blasphemy worthy of death. is made publicly, before a cloud of witnesses—Christ, as the Son of God, gives thanks to him that sitteth on the throne for having granted his heart's desire and fulfilled all his mind. Psalm 20 : 4. Then, lifting up his voice with divine authority, he cries aloud, "Lazarus, come forth!" O glorious representation of that majestic sound wherewith the last trumpet shall address all that sleep, and shall awaken them from the dust! It is thy voice, O Savior, which we shall hear sounding in the recesses of the tomb—that voice which shall pierce the rocks, and divide the mountains, and summon the dead from the lowest deeps—that voice whereby a world was made, and whereby it shall be dissolved—that voice which called time into being, and which, when time is no more, shall declare the approach of eternity.

Lo! the almighty Word hath loosed those bands whereby the beloved Lazarus was holden—the linen folds which, according to the custom of the Jews, were wrapped around his body, (together with aromatic spices,) are yet left on him, that the astonished beholders might see the signs of death with the proofs of life, and that they might be convinced, by irrefragable evidence, both of the separation of his soul and body, and of their

re-union. If the voice of Christ was thus powerful while he remained in his state of humility, how powerful shall it be in that awful day when he shall return, with majesty and glory, to judge the quick and the dead! It shall then shake the canopy of heaven, and move the foundations of the earth. Once it shook the earth—but now he hath promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”

With what salutations, what joyful embraces did the happy sisters of Lazarus receive him from his grave! What amazement was in their looks—what ecstasy in their hearts! what adoration of that God and Savior who recalled him to life! The surrounding neighbors and friends behold the mighty act, but with various impressions of mind. Some of them believed and confessed that Jesus was the Christ—others went their way to the Pharisees, and by means of his very miracles inflamed the rancor of his enemies. Lord, when thy hand was lifted up, they would not see—the veil of prejudice and obduracy was on their hearts—they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. In vain had Moses said unto the fathers, “A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you—every soul that will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.” In vain had all the prophets from Samuel, and those that followed after, foretold the promised Messiah. They heard not Moses and the prophets—neither were they persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

## 30.—CHRIST'S ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

Never did our Savior take so much state upon him as now, when he was going towards his passion. Other journeys he undertook without pomp or dignity—this with numerous attendants and loud acclamation. Yet even here, O Lord, thou didst blend thine accustomed humility with thy triumphs—Thou, whose chariots are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, (that the Scripture might be fulfilled,) wouldst, even in this thy royal progress, demonstrate thy contempt of worldly magnificence—“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion—shout, O daughter of Jerusalem—behold, thy King cometh to thee—he is just, and having salvation—lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” O blessed Lord, thou who wert indeed the King of Israel, wouldst be proclaimed so—but in the very moment of thy asserting thy just pretensions, thou wouldst make it appear that thy kingdom was not of this world—that the glories on which the affections of mankind are wont to dwell so fondly, were held by thee in their due estimation. The multitude alone are thine attendants—their homely garments, their green boughs are spread in the way before thee—they exclaim with shouts of joy, “Hosanna to the Son of David—blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord !”

Where are now the Scribes and Pharisees ? Where are the great rulers of the synagogue, who had declared that whosoever confessed that Jesus was the Christ should be punished with instant excommunication. Behold here the bold and undaunted followers of the Messiah, who bare witness to him in the presence of all their brethren, at the gate of the royal city. In vain shall the adversaries of Christ attempt to suppress his glory. Sooner shall they veil the face of the sun from shining

on the world, than withhold the beams of his divine truth, by their envious opposition, from the eyes and hearts of his people. In spite of all Jewish malignity, his kingdom is confessed, is applauded, is blessed.

O thou that art fairer than the children of men, in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness and righteousness. Full of grace are thy lips, because God hath blessed thee for ever !

Thus proclaimed, thus accompanied, our Savior enters into the city of Jerusalem—Jerusalem, noted of old as the residence of kings, of priests, of prophets. Of kings, for there was the throne of David—of priests, for there was the temple—of prophets, for there they delivered their oracles, and their blood was shed. Thither would Jesus come in his three-fold character as King, as Priest, as Prophet. Acknowledged with hosannas as a King—teaching the people, and foretelling the destruction of their city, as a Prophet—and, as a Priest, taking possession of his temple, and vindicating it from the foul profanations of Jewish sacrilege. Often had he repaired to Jerusalem without alarming his enemies, because without any semblance of state—now, when he gives some little glimpse of his royalty, “all the city is moved.” When the eastern sages brought the first notice of the King of the Jews, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him—the King of the Jews himself approaches, and lo, a new commotion ! One spectator draws on another—the noise increases with the concourse—all is fear, and anxiety, and expectation. “Who is this ?”

Was it a question of applause, or of contempt, or of ignorance ? Doubtless the multitude inquired seriously, from a desire of information. Not that they were unacquainted with the person of Christ, whose doctrine and miracles had justly rendered him well known amidst his countrymen—but they beheld him invested as it were with some new and mysterious character—laying claim

to distinctions from which he had hitherto retired—encouraging and applauding the zealous acclamations of his adherents.

The attendant disciples could not be at a loss for an answer. Which of the prophets had not put it in their mouths? “*Who is this? Ask Moses, and he shall tell you—The Seed of the woman that shall break the serpent’s head. Ask our father Jacob, and he shall tell you—The Shiloh of the tribe of Judah. Ask David, and he shall tell you—The King of glory. Ask Isaiah, and he shall tell you—Emanuel—Wonderful—Counsellor—The Mighty God—The Everlasting Father—The Prince of Peace. Ask Jeremiah, and he shall tell you—The Branch of David—The Lord our Righteousness. Ask Daniel, and he shall tell you—The Messiah. Ask Hosea, and he shall tell you—The Lord God of Hosts—the Lord is his memorial. Ask John the Baptist, and he shall tell you—The Lamb of God. Ask the God of the prophets, He hath told you, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Ask even the powers of darkness themselves—they have been compelled to exclaim, I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.*” Gen. 3 : 15 ; 49 : 10 ; Ps. 24 : 7, 10 ; Isa. 7 : 14 ; 9 : 6 ; Jer. 23 : 5, 6 ; Dan. 9 : 25, 26 ; Hos. 12 : 5 ; John, 1 : 36 ; Mat. 3 : 17 ; Luke, 4 : 34.

Among the attending multitudes some are found whose voice, preventing that of the disciples, makes answer—“*This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth in Galilee.*”

Ye undervalue your Master, O ye sincere but mistaken followers of Christ—the herald who proclaimed his approach was himself more than a prophet. This is no other than that God by whom the prophets were both sent and inspired. Not Nazareth, but *Bethlehem* was the place of his birth, the proof of his tribe, the evidence that he was the expected Messiah. He whom ye thus confessed no doubt pardoned the defects of your confession. Ye spake according to the common rumor which was diffus

ed among the people. The two disciples on their way to Emmaus gave him no other title. Their faith had not yet received its completion—the Holy Spirit of God had not yet descended from heaven to teach them all things. Even this testimony, imperfect as it was, found favor with the Father of mercies. If we make profession of the truth, according to the best of our knowledge, though in many things we all offend, the goodness of God endureth continually—not judging us for what we have not, but accepting us in what we have. Shouldst thou, O Lord, be extreme to require from us perfection of knowledge, O Lord, who could abide it? What would be the condition of those souls whose errors, not proceeding from malice, but ignorance, meet with pity and forgiveness at thy throne? Blessed Savior, how can we sufficiently adore thine infinite mercy, that, where thou findest a diligent inquiry after the truth joined with an honest simplicity of heart, thou regardest not our unwilling defects, thou despisest not our well-meant confessions!

Already had the people proclaimed Christ as a King—now, they declare him to be a Prophet. Why did not the Roman legions betake themselves to arms on the former declaration? Why did not the scribes and Pharisees, and the envious priesthood, revolt against the latter? They had made decrees against him—they had laid wait for him—they had repeatedly attempted to take away his life—yet now, behold, he passes along through the streets of Jerusalem hailed as the King and Prophet of his people, without a shadow of opposition from his enemies. To what can this be imputed but to the powerful and over-ruling arm of his Godhead? He who restrained the rage and malice of Herod on the first news that a King was born, now restrains all the rulers of Jerusalem from lifting up their hand against this last and public acknowledgment of the regal and prophetic office of Christ. Till the Divine sufferer himself consents to pour

out his soul unto death, in vain do his adversaries take counsel together to destroy the Lord's anointed.

In this manner, O Savior, dost thou pass through the streets of Jerusalem to the temple—not to the royal palace, not to the “chief places of concourse,” but to the temple. When a pious and dutiful son returns from a far country, whither does he first betake himself but to his father's house? There thy presence, O Lord, was most necessary—there the fountain of truth, corrupted and poisoned by deep and dangerous abuses, sent forth polluted streams into the once holy city. Surely all good or evil is increased and strengthened in proportion as it is connected with the temple. If God have there faithful servants—if men find there wholesome instruction and holy examples, the people will not be without benefit. The precious oil which was poured on the head of Aaron, descended to the skirts of his garments.

No sooner is Christ arrived at the house of God than he begins the work of Reformation. That holy ground was profaned by sacrilegious traffic—a public mart was held within the court of that sacred place. The great Lord of the temple comes to vindicate its insulted honor—and, full of just indignation, drives out these impious offenders—casts down their tables—scatters their guilty heaps—and sends away their adherents with shame and confusion.

With what astonishment of mind did these Jews behold their heavenly Reprover! How did their conscience smite them more than his scourge, while that meek and gentle Savior, who came to take our stripes upon him, darted forth sacred vengeance from his eyes, and with his uplifted arm chastised their profanations! Surely it became thee, O Redeemer of men, to let the world perceive that thou hadst not lost thy justice in thy mercy—that while thy compassion is infinite, thy severity is awful—that thou couldst thunder as well as shine.

There is a reverence due to the house of God, and to the service to which it is dedicated. Actions of a secular nature are not fit for that sacred roof, much less those which are unhallowed and profane. "Ye shall reverence my sanctuary—I am the Lord." The covetousness of the priests, the frauds of the money-changers, were an intolerable abuse of the temple. What but holiness can become that place, which is itself the Beauty of Holiness?

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me—and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple—even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver—and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts."



## 91.—CHRIST BETRAYED.

So obnoxious were Christ who raised Lazarus, and Lazarus whom Christ raised, to the envious priests, and scribes, and elders, that they consult to murder both. While either of them lives, the glory of that miracle cannot die, nor the shame of its opponents. Assembled in the palace of Caiaphas, they join with one consent, and are confederate against the Son of God. Eager as they are for the destruction of the innocent, their prudence suggests to them that open violence will be fruitless. Subtily and treachery must do that which would be vainly attempted by power.

A fit instrument is speedily pitched upon for this accursed purpose. Among the chosen followers of Christ one is found who was in his heart the servant, not of God, but of Mammon. Of what arts is not that soul capable which is enslaved by the hateful power of avarice? Judas, who heard Christ daily, whom others heard preach Christ daily, who witnessed the miracles of his Master, and doubtless shared those miraculous gifts bestowed on his companions, is first a thief, and afterwards a traitor. "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?"

O wretched Judas, what will they, what can they give of equal value with Him whom thou offerest as a victim to their malice? Were they able to pay, or thou to receive, all the precious treasures of the world, how were this price equivalent to that *Word of God* by whom all things were made? Could they have bestowed on thee the empire of the universe, or given thee supremacy over the bright luminaries of heaven, thy folly would still have kept pace with thy presumption. Alas, what had they, miserable men, to offer for such a purchase? The time was, when he who instigated thee to this treason could say to thy Master, "All the kingdoms of the

world, and the glory of them are mine—all these will I give thee.” Had he attempted to shake *thy* fidelity by a similar proposal the base worldling might have found some excuse for thine apostacy—but when we behold thee giving up thy blessed Lord and Savior to his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, we know not whether more to abhor thy treachery or to wonder at thine infatuation.

The price was not more despicable than the undertaking was audacious. Had all the powers of hell combined with their emissary, they could not have delivered our Savior into the hands of men. “No man taketh my life from me,” saith Christ, “but I lay it down of myself.” Had he been pleased to resist, his word would at once have consigned the traitor and his accomplices to their just punishment. O blessed Lord, all our safety, all our happiness depends not so much upon thine *act*, as upon thy *will*. In vain might we expect benefit from thy passion, if thou hadst undergone that by constraint which thou didst voluntarily sustain for our salvation.

The compact is made—the price is given—Judas returns and with unblushing effrontery looks on his Master and on his companions. His heart told him he was false—but he was in possession of the price of blood! He was not now for the first time a hypocrite. The pass-over is at hand—Judas is no less diligent to make preparation for it, no less ready to receive it, than the most faithful and zealous of the apostles.

How many proofs had this traitor received of his Master's omniscience! Every day afforded fresh demonstration that the thoughts and intents of the heart were under the cognizance of Christ—nay, while Judas attempts to conceal his baseness, our Savior conceals not his own knowledge of it. “Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” Who would not think that wickedness, so discovered, would be full of shame? Did not Judas blush, and grow pale again, and cast down his guilty

eyes, and turn away his troubled countenance? Alas, that brow is steeled against every generous feeling; that heart knows neither pity nor repentance. Could the disciples have observed on any countenance among their fellows the least token of confusion, the words of their Master would have affected them with less poignant sorrow—now, rather thinking fit to distrust their own innocence than their Master's assertion, each trembles while he inquires, "Lord, is it I?" It is possible there may lurk some secret wickedness in the soul, unsuspected by ourselves. Whither may we not be suffered to fall, if we trust too presumptuously to our own strength? It is both wisdom and duty to be ever on our guard, and to examine our hearts with the most scrupulous accuracy. Happy is the man who so feareth alway. "Lord, is it I?"

Meanwhile, how hath Judas deceived his companions! Had his former life been stamped with notorious wickedness they would have found an object on which to rest their just suspicions. Now, his past villany has been so studiously concealed that every one of the apostles is as ready to suspect himself as him who was really guilty. Well might the God of all knowledge exclaim, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!" Judas can hear the denunciations of judgment against himself—he can hear his Master say, "Wo be to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed—good were it for that man if he had never been born," and yet he is no more appalled than very innocence. He has made a covenant with death, and with hell an agreement. O Judas, didst thou ever hear ought but truth from the lips of thy divine reprover? canst thou distrust the certainty of that dreadful menace of vengeance? how wert thou not afraid, after such an intimation, to persist in thine atrocious purpose?

As if that shameless offender would brave all accusation, and stifle all remorse, he too dares ask, "Master, is

it I?" No disciple shall protest more loudly against this crime than he who fosters it in his own bosom. His Lord knows him to be a traitor—he shall not live to complain—his brethren account him virtuous—ali is well, while he is well esteemed. Reputation is all the care of false hearts—not truth, not honor, not conscience: while they appear innocent to men, they care not how criminal they are in the sight of God.

Had our Savior been less perfect in knowledge, a question of this nature would have led him to doubt the reality of his apostle's guilt. Who could imagine that a self-convicted sinner would thus meet a just accusation? But He, whose all-piercing eyes behold things as they are, not as they seem to be, can answer this bold inquiry with a direct affirmation—"Thou hast said." Wretched Iscariot, couldst thou think that thou wert able to endure the beams of that Sun which pervades the recesses of thine heart? Was it not sufficient for thee to be secretly vicious, unless thou contendest with an omniscient accuser? Thou didst imagine thy crime unknown—to men it was so. Had thy Master been no more than man, it had been unknown to him—now his knowledge argues him divine. How canst thou yet resolve to lift up thine hand against Him who knows thine offence, and can either prevent or avenge it?

The words spoken by Christ to his treacherous apostle were unheard by the guests around them—but the guilt of Judas shall soon be whispered to one and known by all. Humble and penitent sinners have a claim on us for pity and concealment. Shame is meet for those who are destitute of shame.

The zealous and impatient Peter cannot rest under the anguish of so doubtful a crimination. His breast is tortured with suspense till he know the man. His signs ask what his voice dares not. The beloved disciple understands this silent language, and dares give words to

Peter's thoughts. The indefinite assertion of treason among the apostles affords sufficient ground for this inquiry—"Lord, who is it?"

That which was timorously demanded, is answered graciously—"He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it." Our Savior was unwilling to name the criminal—but he will point him out by a sign to his anxious querist. He says not, "Mark that man on whom I shall frown—mark him on whom I shall inflict some public censure"—he rather bestows on the guilty parricide a token of more than ordinary respect and affection. The outward gifts of God are not always proofs of his love—riches, pleasures, honors may be either withholden from us in mercy, or dispensed in just indignation. How groundless had been the jealousy of that disciple who envying the favor done to Judas, had deemed himself treated with undue neglect! So vain are they who measuring God's affection by temporal benefits, are ready to applaud successful wickedness, and grudge them their short-lived happiness who are incapable of any better.

Favors ill-used make the heart capable of any evil. Judas, comparing his Master's action with the gestures of Peter, and the recent conference (unheard by himself) between Jesus and the son of Zebedee, is now more irritated to perform what he had wickedly promised. But, O Lord, how shall we find words in which to express our sense of thy meekness, thy divine long-suffering? No angry words escape thy lips even when addressing the most cruel of thine enemies—"That thou doest, do quickly." Why are we inflamed by our petty wrongs? why do we swell with anger and fly to revenge on every occasion, when the great Example of all patience will not revile even the foul and bloody traitor? The disciples yet remain in ignorance—they know not for what intent our Lord hastens the depar-

ture of his abandoned conspirator. The deed was every way villanous : but if it must be done, delay is only an aggravation of misery. The innocent victim, already doomed to die, speaks as one prepared for suffering, and meekly resigns himself to all the malice of his enemies.

That obdurate heart will not relent. The traitor knows his way to the palace of the High Priest, and points out the time, the place, the manner in which he will give effect to his perfidy. "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he." Yet more hypocrisy? Yet more presumption on such unparalleled lenity? Shall that sacred cheek be contaminated by thine unhallowed touch? The tongue of him who has agreed to sell his Master, dares say "Hail;" the lips which have passed the compact of his death, dare to kiss him whom they had covenanted to murder. O Savior, the scourge, the thorns, the cross, the spear of thy persecutors were not so painful, so piercing as this kiss of Judas. The stabs of an enemy could not be so grievous as the treacherous embrace of a disciple.

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## 92.—THE AGONY.

What a prelude do we find to our Savior's passion! A hymn and an agony. A cheerful hymn and an agony no less sorrowful. A hymn begins, both to raise and to testify the courage of the divine sufferer—an agony follows, to show that he was truly sensible of those extremities of pain and sorrow which he was about to endure. All the apostles (the perfidious Judas excepted) bore their part in that hymn. It was fit they should all see that heroic magnanimity with which he

entered into the lists with his mighty enemies. Only three shall be allowed to be witnesses of his agony—those chosen disciples who had seen his transfiguration. That sight had well fore-armed and prepared them for the scenes which should follow. How could they be disheartened at the spectacle of his sorrows, who had contemplated his splendid Majesty on Mount Tabor? How could their faith and constancy be shaken by his sufferings, who had been present at the manifestation of his celestial radiance, when his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was bright as the light? How could they be offended at seeing him encompassed by Judas and his train, whom they had seen receiving homage from Moses and Elias? How could they be discouraged at hearing the reproaches of base and slanderous men, when they had heard the voice of God bearing witness from that excellent glory, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?”

Now before the eyes of these apostles the Savior of mankind is entering into a dark cloud of anguish—“He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” Many anxious thoughts for those whom he came to redeem had on former occasions been subdued by his divine fortitude—at last his grief is too great to be concealed—“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Blessed Lord, what must thou have felt at the moment of thy complaining? Feeble minds are apt to bemoan themselves on slight occasions—but that grief must needs be violent which causes a strong heart to break forth into passionate lamentation. Alas, what a word is this for thee, the Son of God, to utter! Where is that Comforter whom thou didst promise to send to others? Where is thine eternal Father, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort, in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there is pleasure for evermore? Where is thine undaunted resolution, that thou wouldst walk

through the valley of the shadow of death without fear ? O Lord, thou couldst not thus have suffered, had not the face of thy God been for a while withdrawn from thee, that thou mightest "tread the wine-press alone."

But to whom dost thou reveal thy sorrows, O Savior of mankind ? Hard is the lot of him who must resort for support to his inferiors. Had Peter, or James, or John uttered such a lamentation to thee, they would at once have found rest to their souls—thou wouldst have been both ready to show compassion and able to afford relief. But now, while thou makest thy lamentation to them, what issue dost thou expect ? They might be astonished and filled with horror at thy grief, but they had no power to give thee assistance, or even to mitigate, while they shared, thy wo. Indeed, what could all the angels of heaven, of themselves, do to succor thee ? What strength could they have but from thee ? What creature can help when thou complainest ?

The venerable Simeon prophesied to thy blessed mother, that a sword should pierce through her soul. How many swords in one moment pierced through thine, when thou criedst out, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death ?" It was not thy body that suffered now—yet thou who wert best acquainted with the nature of thy sorrows, declarest thyself not only assaulted, but possessed, by grief—grief so vehement as to be without relaxation, and as it were without remedy—*exceeding sorrowful unto death.*

O blessed Savior, what was it, what could it be, which thus lay heavy on thy divine soul ? Was it that thou didst fear to die ? Was it that thou didst shrink with horror from the pain, and shame, and torment of thine approaching crucifixion ? O poor and base thoughts of weak and impotent mortality ! How many thousands of thy blessed martyrs have welcomed no less exquisite tortures with smiles and congratulations ? how many have



triumphed in the midst of those sufferings which their very persecutors thought were intolerable? If their weakness was thus undaunted, and could thus prevail, how could thy power fail of the victory? No—it was the grievous weight of the sin of a guilty world—it was the burden of thy Father's wrath in consequence of that sin, which thus pressed upon thy soul, and wrung from thee these affecting lamentations.

What can it avail thee, O Savior, to tell thy grief to man? Who can afford thee succor, but He of whom (speaking in thy human character) thou saidst, "My Father is greater than I?" Lo, to Him thou hast recourse. "O my Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me!"

Was not this the prayer, blessed Lord, which in the days of thy flesh thou offeredst up, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save thee from death? Never was any voice so strong—never was God so solicited. O thou who saidst, "I and my Father are One," dost thou suffer ought from thy Father but what thou hadst consented, hadst determined to suffer? Was this cup placed in thy hands by accident or by compulsion? Away with these mistaken suppositions of ignorance and frailty. Thou camest to suffer, and thou wouldst do what thou camest for. But since thou wert willing to embrace the whole of our human nature, sin only excepted—since it is human and not sinful for the heart to recoil at suffering—thou wouldst both show what the nature which thou hadst assumed would be inclined to wish, and what, in regard to the salvation of mankind, thou hadst deliberately fixed on. "Not as I will, but as thou wilt!"

While thy mind was thus agitated by varied emotions, no marvel if thy feet were not fixed—thy place is changed, but not thy thoughts—now thou awakenest the vigilance of thy disciples—now thou returnest to thy ardent prayer. Again thou art prostrate on thy face—

thy soul as well as thy body is brought low, even to the earth—it cleaveth to the dust. As thy sorrows increase, so doth the vehemence of thy supplication—“ Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly—and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” O thou Lover of souls, what pain, what fear, what strife, what horror was in thy sacred breast! How didst thou struggle under the burden of our offences while thou wert encountering the indignation of heaven in our behalf! Till thou camest to take our human nature, all was peace with thee—thou wert one with thy co-eternal Father—all the angels worshipped thee—all the powers of heaven and earth acknowledged thy supreme dominion. It was thy condition as man, which exposed thee to this misery and torment. In that, thou didst sustain thy Father’s wrath. If eternal death be intolerable—if every sin deserve eternal death—what were those sufferings which in one tremendous hour made atonement for a guilty world! Teach us, oh teach us to abhor our own wickedness—to admire and to bless thy mercy.

But, O ye glorious spirits who came to comfort the Savior of mankind in his agony, how did ye look upon the Son of God when ye saw him in this severity of conflict! With what astonishment did ye behold the object of your adorations thus “ acquainted with grief!” In the wilderness, after he had been assaulted by Satan, ye came and ministered unto him—and now, after a harder combat, ye appear to strengthen him. O marvellous dispensation of the Almighty—an angel shall relieve him whom God doth afflict. The Son shall suffer—the servant shall bring consolation. The God of angels is overwhelmed with sorrow—the angel of God appears unto him, strengthening him.

Blessed Jesus, if as a man thou wouldst be made a little lower than the angels, it could not dishonor thee to be attended and comforted by an angel. Thine humility

would not have disdained relief, however administered—thy God pours balm into thy wounds, as seemeth good in his sight. Behold, though thy cup shall not pass from thee, its bitterness shall be diminished—though thou see not the face of thy Father, the hand of his mercy is upon thee—what could that spirit have done but under the sanction of the God of spirits? O Father of mercies, thou mayest bring thy servants into agony, but thou wilt not give them over unto despair. Whatever are the means of our support, we acknowledge and adore the Author.

“In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.”

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### 93.—PETER AND MALCHUS.

Alas, what broken reeds are men? While our Savior is in his agony, the apostles are sleeping, as in a moment of the most profound tranquillity. Admonitions, threatenings, entreaties, cannot induce them to watch one hour with their suffering Master. While he tells them of danger, they think of ease—and though twice awakened, return to their slumber. O Lord, what consolation was afforded thee by these thy followers? The sincerity of their intentions was rendered ineffectual by the prevalence of mortal infirmity. In the mount where thou wert transfigured they were overwhelmed with amazement—and now in the hour of thine agony they are lost in sleep, when they should compassionate thy sufferings.

Doubtless even this disregard made thy prayers more fervent. The less comfort we meet with on earth, the more we seek, the more we find above. Thou, O Savior, “wert heard in that thou fearedst.” An angel sup-

plies what was deficient through the weakness of men. That spirit was vigilant while thy disciples slept. Thou couldst not but be benefited by the exchange.

No sooner is this good angel departed than the son of perdition appears. Judas shows himself at the head of his band of ruffians. The remorseless traitor, who had so long followed his blessed Master, affects to be the leader of these barbarous assailants—still he mixes hypocrisy with villany—his very salutations and kisses murder. Even now, O Lord, (while the audacious sinner by his enormities crucifies thee afresh,) the false pretender to religion betrays thee. All who under a show of godliness practise impiety—all who honor thee with their lips, while their hearts are far from thee, walk in the steps of the apostate Judas, and follow his example.

Who can, without the liveliest emotions, hear the gracious words of the Lamb of God to his rebellious disciple? “*Friend*, wherefore art thou come?” As yet, Judas, it was not too late. Had one spark of grace remained in thy perfidious bosom, that word had brought thee on thy knees. But all this sunshine cannot melt an obdurate heart. The sign is given: Jesus is taken. Wretched traitor, why wouldst thou for this purpose be so attended? Why was such a band so armed, employed against the Lord of life? Had our Savior refused to obey, all the forces of the world, all the powers of hell had been insufficient; and since he was ready to be delivered up into the hands of sinners, there was no need of an hostile multitude. When he said, “I am he,” that breath alone routed all the troops, and cast them to the earth. What if he had said, “I will not be taken,” where had they been? or what could their swords and staves have done against omnipotence?

The disciples who had failed of their vigilance, fail not of their courage. They had heard their Master speak of providing weapons, and now they thought it was time to

use them—"Lord, shall we smite?" But Peter, instead of opening his lips, unsheaths his sword—instead of waiting for permission, smites. He had noted Malchus, a servant of the high priest, too ready to second Judas and to raise his sacrilegious hand against the Savior of mankind. On a sudden his indignation rises and his arm is lifted up. That ear which had officiously listened to the unjust and cruel charge of a wicked traitor, is now severed from the head of this audacious offender.

I love and honor thy zeal, O blessed disciple. Thou couldst not endure the wrong done to thy divine Master. Had thy life been dearer to thee than his safety, thou wouldst not have drawn thy sword upon a whole troop. It was in the sincerity of thine heart (notwithstanding the sad events which followed) that thou hadst averred, "Though all men should be offended, yet will not I—though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." But wherefore didst thou not rather attack the miscreant who betrayed thy Lord, than the stranger who arrested him? Were not the head and heart which *devised* this atrocious mischief more culpable than the hand which executed it? Was not the treason of a friend more odious than the hostility of an hireling? Or was it that the guilty wretch, after the perpetration of his crime, shrouded himself under the wings of darkness?—that thou couldst not at once comprehend the extent of his villany?—that thou couldst not instantly be roused to indignation against him who had been thy companion, thine equal, and thine own familiar friend? Whatever were thy motives, the act itself meets with reproof from that innocent Sufferer in whose defence thou wert thus insensible of danger. "Put up again thy sword into its place—for all they that take the sword, shall perish by the sword." Good intentions will not give a sanction to intemperate rashness. The God whom we serve can at once accept our meaning and censure our act. Could there be an

object more worthy of zealous affection than such a Master? Could there be a more just cause wherein to be prodigal of life? Yet this love, this cause cannot exempt Peter from the gentle correction of his Lord.

When the Prince of Peace bade his followers sell their garments and buy a sword, he meant to insinuate the *danger*, not the method of averting it. When they therefore replied, "Behold, here are *two* swords," he answered, "It is enough." If he had actually intended to arm them in his defence, many more would have been necessary. If he would be led as an unresisting victim to the slaughter, the zeal of Peter is superfluous—"Put up thy sword." There is a temporal sword; and he who bears it, bears it not in vain: for he is ordained to be an avenger, that wrath may be executed on evil-doers. But wo to him who draws it without just authority, without lawful commission from above! No marvel if they who so take the sword should, by a just retribution, perish by the sword. "Thou hast zeal, O my faithful servant, but not according to knowledge. Thine act is not only inconsiderate, but dangerous. *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* Thou drawest thy sword to rescue me from suffering. Alas, if I suffer not, what would become of thee? what would become of mankind? how would effect be given to that eternal purpose, whereby I am a Lamb slain from the beginning of the world? Wilt thou hinder thine own salvation, and that of all others, to the end of time? Hast thou forgotten the rebuke given thee on a former occasion, when thou didst suggest to me this immunity from my passion? Mat. 16 : 23, and wilt thou attempt a real opposition to this great and necessary work? Canst thou imagine that this suffering of mine is not altogether free and voluntary? Canst thou think that I yield, as having no means of resistance? Have not I given to thee, and to the world, the most undeniable proofs

of my omnipotence? Even now hast thou seen the powerful efficacy of one word from my lips on these weak assailants. At this moment, were I to ask aid of my Father, all the glorious angels of heaven would leave their thrones for my rescue. Could this accord with the justice of my decree, with the glory of my mercy, with the benefit of man's redemption, it would be done—my power would triumph over the impotent malice of my enemies. But now, as that decree must be accomplished, as that mercy must be approved, as mankind must be ransomed, as all this cannot be done without my suffering, thy well-meant valor is no other than a wrong to thyself, to the world, to me, to my Father."

While thou rebukest the zeal of thy disciple, O Lord, thou dost at the same time interpose for his preservation. Though he hath smitten, he is unwounded—though his arm hath caused blood to flow from thine enemy, he receives no return of violence from that band of ruffians. It was thy power which restrained their rage—thy gracious interposition which prevented their revenge.

Meanwhile, how does thine example as well as thy doctrine teach us the forgiveness of injuries! O thou compassionate Savior, many greater wonders hadst thou wrought—none which exhibited more mercy, more divine meekness, than this thy last miracle of healing—none which more loudly proclaimed thy gracious clemency, thy goodness to thy very enemies. Wherefore came this man but in a hostile manner to deprive thee of life or liberty? What pretensions could the servant of Caiaphas make to favor? Had he not been foremost among thine assailants, how would he have met the sword of thine apostle? Yet now, encircled by the throng of thine apprehenders, while their malice and violence were at their height, while thou wert in instant peril of death, thou healest that ear which had refused to hearken to thine instructive voice—which had listened eagerly to the blasphemy of

the multitude, while they conspired to take away thy life. O Malchus, is not thine heart broken with remorse for having meditated evil against one endued with so much power and goodness? Wilt thou devise further mischief against him? Wilt thou not acknowledge his omnipotence and magnify his tender mercies? Can thy companions behold a spectacle like this with relentless hearts? Unthankful Malchus and cruel soldiers, ye will not abandon your execrable purpose. Steeled against pity, remorse, conviction, ye persist in your bloody enterprise—ye accomplish your horrible design. “They that had laid hold on Jesus led him away.”



#### 94.—CHRIST BEFORE CAIAPHAS.

The traitor Judas, who soon after terminated his crimes by a miserable suicide, gave this charge concerning his blessed Master—“Hold him fast.” Fear makes his guard cruel: they bind their innocent prisoner, and think no manacles strong enough for this mighty adversary. Behold those hands which made heaven and earth wrung together and bruised with those merciless cords—behold Him bound who came to restore us to the liberty of the children of God—behold the Lord of Life contemptuously dragged through the streets of Jerusalem to Anas, to Caiaphas, to Pilate, to Herod, while the base and inconstant multitude follow him with expressions of insult and contumely! The act of death has not in it so much misery and horror as the pomp of death.

But what needed all this pageant of cruelty? Wherefore this lingering of an unjust execution? Was it that their malice thought a quick despatch too great mercy?



Was it that while they meant to be bloody they would seem to be equitable? A sudden violence would have been evidently murderous: now the color of a legal process seems to conceal their deep malignity—seems to render them honorable, and the accused guilty.

This seizure of our Lord was effected in its proper hour—a deed of so much darkness was not for the light. It is now resolved that he shall die; and now pretences are sought that he may appear worthy of death. The priests, and scribes, and elders are foremost in this atrocious act—they have paid the price of his blood, and they look on Jesus as their own. The convention is held in the hall of Caiaphas. False witnesses are sought for and receive their instructions. What safety can innocence find where the evidence is thus wilfully corrupted? What state was ever so pure as not to afford some miscreants who would barter their conscience for gold? Yet even so the accusers of Jesus agree not, but shame themselves and their suborners. God hath set a mark upon falsehood—he hath stigmatized it with dissonance and distraction. Blessed Savior, what purity was in thy doctrine, what holiness in thy life, that malice itself, when it sought thy destruction, could not so much as devise what to slander!

At last two false witnesses are found, whose testimony is less incongruous and contradictory to itself—“This fellow said, *I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.*” And were these the words which proceeded from his sacred lips? He spake of a temple—of destroying—of building—of three days; but he spake of the temple of his body: in the figurative language of prophecy he fore-shadowed his death and his resurrection—he spake of his conflict, and his victory. The words were his—the construction yours: the words were true—the evidence false and slanderous.

Where the resolution is previously taken, any pretence

will be sufficient to carry it into effect. Had those words been spoken, as it was suggested, they contained no crime—had he been, as they supposed him, a mere man, the speech had carried a semblance of ostentation, no semblance of blasphemy. Yet how vehement is Caiaphas for an answer! as if that hallowed pile had already suffered sacrilegious violence: as if our Lord had rashly assailed the temple and Him that dwelleth therein.

That infinite wisdom well knew how little satisfaction there could be in his reply, where the sentence was determined. "Jesus held his peace." Where the questioner is unworthy, the question captious, the tendency of it malicious, the best answer is silence.

When our Lord stood before the cruel Annas, his sacred cheek was smitten for his just and moderate reply—now his silence is no less displeasing. Caiaphas was crafty as well as rancorous. What was in vain attempted by false witnesses, shall be accomplished by means of the prisoner himself—a solemn adjuration shall make it unnecessary to have recourse to the testimony of accusers. "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." O Caiaphas, thy lips are unhallowed, but thy charge is dreadful. Now, if Jesus hold his peace, he incurs the guilt of disregarding that awful name—if he speak, he is ensnared. An affirmation is death—a denial, worse than death. Now then shalt thou learn that it was not fear which had closed that gracious mouth. He who hath charged us to confess him before men, will not refuse to confess himself—"Jesus saith unto him, *Thou hast said.*"

There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak—Christ, the wisdom of God, hath given us an example of both. We must not so speak as to give advantage to cavils—we must not be so silent as to betray the truth. Proud and insulting Caiaphas, no longer shalt thou complain of a speechless prisoner: thou shalt hear more

than thou demandest. "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." There spake the Messiah—the voice of God, and not of man. The Son of Man, whom thou seest arraigned before thy consistorial seat, is the Son of God, whom thou shalt hereafter behold, to thine unutterable confusion, sitting in majesty on the throne of heaven, attended with thousands of glorious angels, and coming in the clouds to that dreadful judgment, when profane and remorseless hypocrites shall stand before his just tribunal, and receive the recompense due to their crimes.

The design of Caiaphas is answered. Now, in an affected zeal for the honor of religion, he rends his garments at the words of Christ. Certain of the applause and support of those around him, he addresses them as one jealous for the insulted majesty of God. "What further need have we of witnesses? Behold now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" And they answered and said, "He is guilty of death."

What indignities can be too great for him who is declared worthy to die? Now, O blessed Lord, is the fury of thy malignant enemies let loose upon thee. Now is thy face defiled with their spittle—now their cruel hands are lifted up to buffet thy cheek—now scorn and insult trample upon thy humble patience. "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ—who is he that smote thee?" The predictions of thy lamentable passion are literally fulfilled. Well spake the Holy Ghost of thee by the mouth of Esaias, "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief—for the transgression of my people was he smitten." Thou art buffeted, O Lord, in whose mouth was no guile—thou art condemned, who canst alone absolve the world.

But, O gracious and merciful Redeemer, how can we sufficiently adore the wonders of thy love, who in the

midst of all these scenes of barbarity couldst vouchsafe to cast an eye of pity on thy frail, thy fallen apostle ! When that murderous band apprehended thee, thou didst forget thine own danger, and warn him against the effects of intemperate and furious zeal—now, in the midst of thine arraignment and condemnation, thou disregardedst thy personal sufferings, to reclaim him from more grievous errors—and by that seasonable *look*, to strike his heart with salutary contrition. He who lately was so intrepid as to hazard his life in thy defence, now shrinks from the imputation of being thy disciple—he who had not been daunted with the sight of a hostile troop, is at once deprived of courage by a word. Thou didst foreshow his danger, and by thine admonition didst aggravate his offence. The stone at which he stumbled was previously pointed out to him by thy wisdom and mercy. How loud were his declarations, that though he should die with thee, he would not deny thee ? Had he received that too necessary caution with trembling silence, his fall had been less shameful and dangerous. Good purposes, when they are abandoned, serve only to augment the guilt and sorrow of the offender.

O Peter, whence this vehement and peremptory denial of thy blessed Master ? What danger had attended on thy public profession of thine adherence to him ? One of thy companions was known to the high-priest as a follower of Jesus—yet he not only came into the assembly where his innocent Master was declared worthy of death, but procured thy subsequent admission. They that kept the door knew him to be, what he affected not to conceal—they therefore address thee with confidence—“ Art not thou *also* one of this man's disciples ? ” What accusation was brought against thine associate ? What danger did he incur ? Whence arose thy fear and consternation ? Was it that thou wert apprehensive of punishment by means of the late-wounded Malchus, his

friends, or kinsman? Didst thou despair of assistance from thy Lord now standing at the tribunal of his arrogant enemies? To avoid the imputation of too much zeal, dost thou renounce all knowledge of him for whom that zeal had been exerted?

Be this as it may, thy sin was heinous. I tremble at the fall of such an apostle. It was thou, O Peter, who didst afflict thy Master more than these insolent Jews. It was to thee he turned his face from them, that he might see the man by whom he most smarted—he heard thy thrice repeated denials, and answered thee with a look—such a look as was able to melt and to convert the soul. That one glance hath recalled thee to virtue and to repentance—it hath awakened thy faith, thy love, thy constancy—but it hath caused to flow abundantly the streams of penitential sorrow. Now is thine head as waters, and thine eyes are as fountains of tears. “And Peter went out and wept bitterly.”



## 95.—CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

The Jewish people had rejected their heavenly King, and justly fell under the Roman yoke. Too well did Tiberius consult their froward and restless dispositions, in delegating his authority to one who permitted their malice to wield the sword which had been wrested from them by their conquerors.

Had they been suffered to retain the power of life and death in their own hands, they would not have been beholden to Pilate for the murder of our Lord. Now, repining at their slavery, but at the same time not unwilling to cast the odium of this bloodshed on another, the great

masters of Israel flock from their own consistory to the judgment-hall of Pilate. The sentence had been theirs, the execution must be his. They approach the Roman governor with assurance of success—they imagine that their numbers, their age, their authority cannot fail of completing their triumph over Jesus of Nazareth.

But wherefore, O ye rulers of Jerusalem, do ye remain at the *door* of Pilate? Why do ye not enter that public court of judicature, to call for the justice ye are soliciting? Was it that ye would not defile yourselves with the contagion of a heathen's roof? Holy men! your consciences would not suffer you to yield to so impure an act—your passover must be kept—your persons must be hallowed—while ye pretend to seek justice from the man, ye abhor the pollution of the place. Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Could there be any mansion so unclean as that of your own breasts? Not Pilate's walls, but your hearts are impure. Is murder your errand, and do you fear a local infection? Are ye thirsting after innocent blood, and do ye fear to be defiled by setting your foot on Pilate's pavement? Wherever ye are met, O ye dissemblers, *there* is the resort of guilt, of impiety, of foul and atrocious wickedness.

The lenient governor condescends to gratify their superstition. They dare not come within his walls: he goes forth to the blood-thirsty conspirators. There is more equity amongst Romans than amongst these barbarous Jews. Even Pilate begins the conference with the just and necessary inquiry, "What accusation bring you against this man?" The priests and elders thought it enough that they had sentenced Jesus—they expected no other than a speedy execution. Civil justice must blindly second their murderous designs. They deem it enough conviction that he is given up to the secular powers—they have judged; Pilate must kill. "*If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.*"

What needs any minute investigation? Dost thou know, Pilate, by whom thou art addressed? Is this the respect paid to our holy priesthood? Is this thine estimation of our sanctity? Had the meanest of the vulgar complained to thee thou couldst not have shown more jealousy and suspicion. Our rank, our station might have exempted us from such distrust. If our scrupulous observance of the law of Moses forbids us even to enter thy walls, how canst thou question the purity of our consciences? After a full hearing, mature deliberation, and all possible regard to justice, we have sentenced this malefactor to death—nothing more remains but thy command for its infliction.”

O *malice* and iniquity beyond example! Must he needs be a criminal, O ye priests and elders, whom ye are resolved to condemn? Is your word a sufficient authority for murder? How often have ye and your fathers been stained with innocent blood? By whose hands perished the prophets? Had truth and sincerity governed your lips, ye must have exclaimed, “If *we* had not been malefactors, we should not have delivered up to thee this guiltless object of our hatred.”

That must needs be notoriously unjust which Pagans cannot hear without detestation. Pilate receives the base and wicked suggestions of the Jewish elders with deserved abhorrence—“Do ye pretend holiness, and urge so injurious violence? If he be such as ye represent, where are the proofs of his crime? If he be not legally sentenced, why should he die? Is your complaint sufficient conviction? If I must decide, wherefore do ye prejudice? Can you imagine that I will condemn any man unheard? If your Jewish laws give you this liberty, the Roman laws give it not to me. Rather complete the work ye have begun; and if your prisoner is deserving of punishment, let him be punished to the extent of your delegated power. *Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.*”

How palpably doth the tongue of these accusers betray the malice of their hearts! They answered, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to *death*." Pilate speaks of judgment—they speak of that which was their only aim. Law is but a pretext—judgment is but a ceremony—death is their object, and without this all their hopes are frustrated. It was well that power should be restrained where malice and cruelty are thus predominant. No innocence could be safe if these sanguinary tyrants were uncontrolled. Indeed, their fury did not always confine itself within the prescribed limits. What law permitted them to put to death that holy and innocent Martyr, whose expiring voice uttered a prayer for his murderers? Even now what law permitted them to *procure* that death by false and unjust insinuation, which they were not permitted to *inflict*? It is the wretched policy of hypocrites to seek a plausible pretence for the accomplishment of their crimes, and to make no other use of laws, whether divine or human, than such as tends to promote their hateful purposes.

The adversaries of Christ, once more interrogated, are not at a loss for their reply. "What accusations, O Pilate? Heinous and capital. Thou mightst have believed our solemn asseveration—but since thou wilt needs urge us to detail particulars, know that *we found this man perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar—saying that himself is Christ, a King*. We come furnished with such a charge as cannot but fill thee with horror and astonishment. Besides the blasphemy which led us to esteem his life forfeited, he is a seducer of the people, a raiser of sedition, a bold usurper of sovereignty." O Savior, what marvel is it if thy faithful servants are loaded with slanders, when thou, who wert innocence itself, couldst not escape these shameful criminations? Thou a perverter of the nation, who didst teach the way of God truly! Thou a forbidder of tribute,



who didst pay it, didst prescribe it, who didst prove it to be Cæsar's due! Thou a claimant of temporal dominion, who didst avoid it, who didst renounce it, who didst take upon thee the form a servant! Well does thine apostle remind us, that through evil report as well as good report lies the path of those servants who would follow their blessed Master. "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to thy charge things that thou knewest not—their mouth was full of cursing, deceit and fraud—under their tongue was mischief and vanity."

Now Pilate is startled at their accusations: the charge is of such a nature as to awaken his most serious attention. No longer does he deem it "a question of their own superstition." He is brought back, as by some potent spell, to the hall of judgment. At his tribunal the innocent and holy Jesus stands meekly to be judged—he who shall at the last day come to judge the quick and the dead—he, before whose awful majesty a guilty world shall stand in terror and amazement.

The name of a king, the name of Cæsar is brought in question—the least whisper of usurpation or disturbance is received with proper jealousy and care. Pilate demands of his prisoner, "Art thou then the King of the Jews?" He felt himself wounded in the tenderest part. Daniel's *weeks* were known to be near their expiration. Many arrogant usurpers, (as Judas of Galilee, Theudas and the Egyptian seducer,) under this pretext, had raised several conspiracies, set up new titles to the crown, gathered forces to maintain their false claims. Pilate imagines this to be a case of the same nature, and eagerly seeks for information.

He who was no less wisdom than truth thought it not best either to affirm or to deny at once. To disclaim that title suddenly, which had of old been given him by the prophets, at his birth by the eastern sages, and so lately by the applauding multitude, would have been in-

jurious to himself. To challenge and demand it absolutely would have derogated from the unambitious meekness of his character. By wise and just degrees therefore doth he so affirm this truth, that he both satisfies the inquirer and takes off all invidiousness from his assertion. Pilate shall know that he is a King; but such as no king needs to dread, such as all kings ought to acknowledge and adore. "My kingdom is not of this world." It is your own misconception, O ye earthly potentates, which is the parent of your fears. Herod hears of a King born, and is troubled. Pilate hears of a King of the Jews, and is incensed. Were ye not ignorant, ye could not be jealous—had ye learned to distinguish aright, your suspicions would vanish.

There is an earthly, and there is a heavenly kingdom—neither of these militate against the other. Your kingdom is secular—Christ's is spiritual: your laws are civil—his divine: your reign is temporal—his eternal: your glory is in pomp, in riches, in magnificence—his glory is in the graces of sanctification, love, peace, righteousness, joy in the Holy Ghost. You are opposed by bold usurpers and seditious insurgents—his enemies are the devil, the world and the flesh. Your sword is material—his the power of the Word and Spirit: your rule is over this outward frame—his over the heart and conscience: you can but kill the body—he is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. So far is he from opposing your government, that by him ye reign—your sceptres are his—but to maintain, not to wield; much less to resist. O the unjust fears of vain men! His intention is not to make you less great, but more happy. He takes not away your earthly kingdoms, who can give you heavenly—he removes not your present diadems, who can crown you with immortal glory.

96.—CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.—*continued.*

The accusation is so fully disproved that Pilate acquits his prisoner. The Jewish rulers stand without—their malice still yields to their superstition. Pilate has examined Jesus in the judgment-hall, and now comes forth to these eager complainants with an answer ill-suited to their expectations—"I find in him no fault at all." O noble testimony to Christ's innocence, from those lips which afterwards doomed him to death! When the Roman governor becomes a slave to the malignant Jews, he can then say, "Let him be crucified." That cruel sentence cannot stigmatize him who has received this free attestation. In spite of the rancor of his enemies, his guiltless life shall have its just tribute of praise—rather than Christ shall want witness, the mouth of Pilate shall be opened in his justification.

How were the murderous Jews thunderstruck with this unexpected word! The absolution of Jesus was death to their hopes: his acquittal was their conviction. "No fault, when we have found crimes? No fault *at all*, when we have condemned him for capital offences? How palpably doth Pilate brand us with falsehood! How shamefully doth he affront our authority and disparage our administration of justice!" The open and ingenuous declaration of the governor exasperates the fury of these zealots—the fire of their indignation is heated seven times more by the sense of their repulse.

As yet, Pilate is not only just but merciful. Gladly would he have protected Jesus, whom he had found faultless.

Corrupt custom, in memory of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, induced the Jews at their passover to liberate one prisoner, however grievous the crimes laid against him. Pilate seeks to avail himself of their

assumed privilege for the safety of Jesus. That he might be more likely to prevail, he opposes him to the nomination of a malefactor so notorious as might be justly deemed unworthy of all mercy—Barabbas, a thief, a murderer, an exciter of sedition—infamous for all—odious to all. Had he proposed a prisoner whose guilt was questionable, he might have feared the decision—he cannot doubt the competition between Jesus of Nazareth and that atrocious criminal. “Then cried they all again, *Not this man, but Barabbas!*”

Who can but lament that a heathen should see Jews so impetuously unjust, so savagely cruel? He knew that there was no fault to be found in Jesus; he knew that there was no crime not to be found in Barabbas—yet he hears, and blushes to hear, their malignant outcry. “Though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain—they denied the Holy One and the Just, and demanded a murderer to be granted unto them.” O Savior, what an indignity was this from thine own nation! Didst thou refuse all glory, to put on shame and misery for their sakes? Didst thou disregard thyself to save them, and do they refuse thee for Barabbas? Didst thou say, “Not heaven, but earth; not sovereignty, but service; not honor, but abasement;” and do they say, “Not him, but Barabbas?”

Thus did ye requite the Lord, O foolish people and unjust. Thus was his soul wounded, even before his death—while he saw your impious rage, and heard your clamor, “Crucify, crucify!”

Pilate would have chastised and released his prisoner. Even this had been an act of cruelty—for what evil had Jesus done? but the cruelty of Pilate was tender mercy in comparison with that of the Jews; no punishment would satisfy them but the death of their victim. While the Roman governor again proclaims our Savior's innocence, his enemies more loudly proclaim their inveterate ma-

lice. They cried the more, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

As their clamor increased the justice of Pilate declined. His feeble and dubious virtue was carried away by the tide of popular tumult. Thrice had he declared our Lord guiltless; now, "willing to content the people," he prepares to sentence him to death. O wretched slave to human ambition! Not God, not his conscience meets with regard, but the giddy multitude—that senseless idol of the proud man's adoration, whose anger is but a fleeting shadow, whose applause is as the wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

Now must the Gentiles complete the bloody deed which these remorseless hypocrites had begun. The cruel Pilate, though he knew that Jesus was delivered for envy, falsely accused, basely and slanderously traduced, no longer refuses to yield to Jewish bigotry and superstition. O Savior, thou didst fulfil thine own word, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair—I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Lord, how can we be sufficiently sensible of those sins which occasioned thy bitter sufferings! Thou wert wounded for our transgressions—thou wert bruised for our iniquities—the chastisement of our peace was upon thee, and by thy stripes we are healed.

Now, into what a world of reproaches, indignities, miseries, art thou entering! To an ingenuous disposition unmerited ignominy is torment enough—but here, bodily anguish is added to mental suffering—and both conspire to gratify the despite and malice of thine enemies.

The perpetrators of these savage cruelties are fierce and merciless soldiers—men inured to blood—in whose very faces were written the characters of murder. These are called together with eager haste—each man has his appointed office—each man, joining insult to barbarity, hastens to add more sorrow to a heart that is grieved.

Was it not enough then, O Savior, that thy sacred

body was stripped of its garments and disfigured with bloody stripes, but that thy person must be thus indignantly treated by thine inhuman enemies—thy back disguised with purple robes—thy temples wounded with a thorny crown—thy face spat upon—thy cheeks buffeted—thy head smitten—thy hand sceptred with a reed—thyself derided with bent knees and scoffing acclamations? Whence are all these mockeries but to insult Majesty? Whence are the ornaments and ceremonies of royal inauguration but to cast scorn on the despised and persecuted Jesus? Was that head fit for thorns which every eye shall hereafter see crowned with glory and supremacy? Was that hand fit for a reed, whose sceptre controlleth all the world? Was that face fit for contumelious spitting, from whose dreadful aspect impenitent sinners shall flee in guilty consternation when he shall arise to shake terribly the earth?

How dost thou abase thyself, O thou Son of the Father, how dost thou abase thyself for mankind? We have sinned, and thou art punished—we have exalted ourselves, and thou art dejected—we have dishonored thee, and thou art scorned—we have smitten thee, and thou art smitten for us—we have clothed ourselves with shame, and thou art covered with robes of ignominy.

Thus disguised, thus bleeding, thus mangled, art thou brought forth to the furious multitude, presented to their derision and reproach. “*Behold the Man!* Behold him, O ye Jews, the man whom ye envied for his greatness, and feared for his usurpation. Does he now command your reverence? Will he wrest the sceptre from the hands of Cæsar? Behold him discolored by cruel buffetings, wounded with thorns, torn with scourges, bathed in blood. Is he not now sufficiently miserable? Would ye expose him to more aggravated sufferings and torment?”

What an inward war is in the heart of Pilate! His

conscience bids him spare—his regard to popularity bids him kill. His wife, warned by a dream, cautions him to refrain from shedding the blood of that just man—the importunate multitude press him for a sentence of death. All expedients have been tried to liberate one whom justice pronounces innocent—all violent motives are urged to condemn one whom malice pronounces guilty.

In the height of this contention, when conscience and a regard to duty are ready to gain the victory in the heart of Pilate, the Jews cry out, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s friend.” Now Jesus must die—this is the fatal, the decisive allegation. In vain shall we hope that a wicked man can prefer virtue to safety. Pilate hastens to the judgment-hall—his lips no longer refuse to pronounce the bloody sentence—“Let him be crucified.”

To what miserable expedients has the sinner recourse when he vainly seeks to stifle the voice of conscience! In the presence of the multitude Pilate took water and washed his hands, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it!” Can the hands then cleanse the heart? Can a crime be so easily obliterated from the book of remembrance? Can a protestation of innocence absolve the guilty? Is murder of no deeper die? Poor and fruitless evasion! Wretched policy of the offender who flattereth himself in his own eyes, and saith, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace!

Little did the desperate Jews know the weight of the blood which they imprecated on themselves, on their children. Had they, like the specious Pilate, sought for *impunity*, their actions would yet have called on heaven for vengeance—but now when they bring it on themselves by a willing execration, what marvel if they suffer accordingly? They delighted in cursing, and it came upon them—they loved not blessing, therefore it was far from them. And have ye not now felt, O wretched and

deluded nation, *whose* blood it was, the guilt of which ye claimed as your own? Have ye not been made a most memorable and lasting example of Divine indignation? Did not many of you live to see your city buried in ashes and drenched with slaughter? Was there ever a people under heaven which exhibited such a spectacle of desolation and misery? Your former cruelties, apostacies, idolatries, occasioned you to be led captive for a season. God cannot but be just. This sin under which you now suffer must needs be something greater than those which went before, as your punishment is more signal. And what can that sin be, but the murder of the Lord of Life? Ye have what ye wished: ye must be miserable till ye are penitent.



### 97.—THE CRUCIFIXION.

The sentence of death is past—and now the spotless victim must be led to instant slaughter. All the streets are full of gazing spectators, waiting for this mournful sight. At last, O Savior, thou comest out of the gate of Pilate's house, bearing the engine of death. To expect thy cross was not torment enough, thou must carry it, and must be an agent in thine own sufferings. Thine insulting enemies are more imperiously cruel, as they are more sure of success. Their merciless tormentings have made thee half-dead already—yet now, as if they had done nothing, they begin afresh, and will force thy weak and fainting nature to new tasks of pain. O true form and condition of a servant! Yet even this act proceeds more from thy love towards mankind, than from the power and malice of thine enemies. Not without thy gracious concurrence did thy Father lay on thee the iniquity of us



all. It was thine own mercy which caused thee to bear our sins upon the cross, and to bear the cross with the curse annexed to it for our sins. Teach us, blessed Lord, to imitate thy divine fortitude—teach us with meekness and resignation to submit to thy correcting hand—write thine own words on the tablet of our hearts, “If any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me!”

When thy loss of blood and excess of pain caused thee to faint under the weight of this burden—when thy feeble paces were too slow for their purpose—when their thirst for thy blood made them impatient of delay, Simon of Cyrene is deputed to bear thy cross: not out of compassion to thy misery—not out of regard to thy bitter sufferings. Thou hast struggled with thy load through the streets of Jerusalem; now they prefer the expediting of thy death to inflicting on thee the pain of a lingering progress. While thou livest they do not esteem themselves either safe or happy.

Hadst thou done this out of choice, O Simon of Cyrene, which thou didst out of constraint, how would thy name have been made glorious as the first man who bore the cross of thy Savior—an office to which millions of blessed martyrs have aspired, and wherein they have been ambitious to succeed thee. Thus to bear the cross had been more honorable than to receive a sceptre—when weighed in the balance with this high privilege, earthly glories had been less than nothing—the mere vanity of vanities.

While thus the Savior of mankind passes along, the streets resound not with one common exclamation. If the malicious Jews and cruel soldiers railed on him, his faithful servants were no less vehement in their cries and lamentations—especially his blessed mother and her zealous associates were passionate in their expressions of sorrow. The divine Sufferer cannot be unmoved at their

anguish—his ears are ever open to the voice of grief—his heart feels the tenderest pity. “ Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” Who would not have thought, O Savior, that thou wouldst have been wholly engaged by thine own sorrows? The expectation of so bitter a death would have overwhelmed any soul but thine—yet, even now, thy gracious eye can look beyond thine own miseries at those of others; and can pity them, who, insensible of the future, mourned for thy present calamities. While they pour out their grief on thee, thou directest them to other causes of sorrow. While thou art in sight of Calvary thou canst foresee and pity the devastation of Jerusalem—prophesying the near approach of ruin to that city which had lately cost thee tears, and now shall cost thee blood. All the cruelty and ingratitude of man deprives thee not of thy mercy.

Jerusalem had other malefactors though Barabbas was dismissed. To give a greater appearance of justice to their bloody revenge, the Jews appointed two capital offenders, adjudged to death, to accompany the Savior of mankind in his last moments. O blessed Jesus, it would have been disparagement enough to thee to have been compared with the best of men—but to be thus associated with notorious transgressors, whom vengeance would not suffer to live, is such an indignity as confounds our thoughts. Surely there was no angel in heaven who would not have rejoiced to attend thee; and whom could the earth afford worthy to form thy train? Yet behold, the malice of thine enemies has given thee companions nearly allied to hell—that their sin might in some measure reflect upon thee—that their acknowledged guilt might cast a stain upon thy perfect innocence. So guarded, so attended, so accompanied, O Savior, art thou led to that disgraceful hill, which thy last blood shall render sacred. Now thou settest thy foot upon that rising

ground which shall anticipate thine Olivet—whence thy soul shall ascend into thy glory.

There, while thou art preparing for thy last act, thou art presented with that bitter potion, wherewith dying malefactors were wont to have their senses stupified before the torments of their execution.

That draught, O Savior, was not more welcome to the guilty than hateful unto thee. In the vigor of all thine inward and outward faculties thou wouldst encounter the most violent assaults of death, and scornedst to abate the least circumstance of thy quickest apprehension. Thou well knewest that the work thou hadst to perform claimed all thy powers—thou didst not seek thine own ease, but our redemption.

Now, even now, O Savior, art thou entering into those dreadful lists, and art about to begin the conflict with thy last enemy. Again do these merciless soldiers lay their rude hands upon thee—again must thy sacred body undergo the shame of an abhorred nakedness. Lo, thou, that clothest man with apparel, animals with hides, and plumage, and scales, and shells, earth with flowers, heaven with stars, art despoiled of thy raiment, and exposed to the scorn of these blasphemers. As the first Adam entered into his Paradise, so dost thou, the second Adam, into thine—and as the first Adam was clothed with innocence, so art thou in this thine humiliation. O happy shame, whereby we are invested with glory—whereby our souls are arrayed in perfect holiness and unfading beauty! Hadst thou not been dishonored, O Lord, we had been clothed in confusion—the curse had been poured upon us, and we had trodden the wine-press of the wrath of God.

Shame is succeeded by torture. Now do these barbarous executioners fasten the Savior of mankind to his cross—now do those iron nails, passing through the palms of his sacred hands, fix him to the accursed tree; which

being suddenly raised up, is settled in the earth by a vehement concussion. Blessed Jesus, how are thy limbs, and joints, and sinews torn by this horrible distension! how does thine own weight torment thee, while thy whole body rests upon this forced and painful hold, thy nailed feet bearing their part in the torturing support? How did the iron enter into thy soul, while, passing through these exquisitely-sensible parts of the body, it riveted thee to thy cross!

There, O blessed Savior, there art thou lifted up, in the sight of thine enemies, naked, bleeding, forlorn, despised, the spectacle of misery, the scorn of men. Be abashed, O ye heavens and earth, and let the world be covered with confusion, to behold the shame, and anguish, and sorrow of its great and omnipotent Creator. O Lord, didst thou take our nature upon thee to be thus derided, thus mangled, thus tortured? Was this treatment fit to be offered to thy sacred body, which was the pure and hallowed temple of the living God? The carnal eye acknowledges thee not, O Savior, in this thine hour of suffering—it cannot distinguish thee, though it approach to thy very cross—while the eye of faith sees thee afar off; and in all this ignominy, and pain, and wretchedness admires the glory of thy mercy. Alas, is this the head that is decked by thine eternal Father with a crown of pure gold, with immortal and incomprehensible majesty, which now is shaded with a thorny diadem? Are these the eyes that saw the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost descend on thyself?—these the eyes that beheld the splendor of celestial brightness on mount Tabor, which now begin to be overclouded with death? Are these the ears that heard the voice of thy Father owning thee from heaven, which now bleed with thorns and glow with reproaches? Are these the lips that spake as never man spake, full of grace and truth, that raised the dead, healed diseases, cast out devils, preached the glorious Gospel of salvation, which now

are swollen and discolored by sacrilegious buffetings? Are these the hands that stretched out the heavens like a curtain, that by their touch gave instant relief to the lame, the deaf, the blind, which now are bleeding with the nails? Are these the feet that lately walked upon the liquid pavement of the sea, before whose footstool all the nations of the earth are commanded to worship, which are now so painfully fixed to the cross?

O cruel and unthankful mankind, who offered such indignities to the Lord of Life! O gracious and loving Redeemer, who wouldst suffer all this for unthankful mankind! That the avenging arm of lawful authority should punish *offenders* with loss of life is terrible, though just: but that wicked men should act thus towards the holy and blessed Son of God—it is beyond the capacity of our horror!



97.—THE CRUCIFIXION.—*continued.*

The malice which brought our blessed Lord to his cross leaves him not there to expire, without every aggravation of torment, every varied indignity which hell itself can suggest. Two thieves are appointed to be his companions in his last moments—his enemies place him in the midst, as one laden with more than ordinary guilt. Wheresoever he turns his eyes, they are met by objects of shame and disgust. But, O blessed Jesus, how shall we celebrate aright thine infinite mercy, who didst improve this refinement of Jewish revenge to the salvation of one; to the comfort of millions! Was not this, as the last, so the greatest act of thy wonderful compassion, that thou didst convert that dying offender? that at such

a time, in such circumstances, thou didst deliver an immortal soul from the very jaws of destruction? Lord, how do we bless thee for this work!—how do we stand amazed at this demonstration of thy goodness and power!

The criminal came to die: nothing was in his thoughts but guilt and torment—while he was yet in his blood, thou saidst, “This soul shall live.” Ere yet the intoxicating potion could affect his senses thy spirit infuses faith into his heart. He who saw death and torture before his eyes, is raised from the things which are seen to the things which are not seen—“Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom.” Is this the voice of a malefactor or of a disciple? Verily we find not so great faith, no not in all Israel. He saw thee hanging on the accursed tree, and he stiled thee “Lord”—he saw thee dying, yet talked of thy kingdom—he felt himself dying, yet spake of a future remembrance—he saw his companion still obdurate, and called upon him to fear God, to acknowledge his own guilt, and the innocence of Jesus—he looked beyond the cross to a crown; beyond dissolution to life and glory. Lord, which of thine apostles thus bare witness to thee in the hour of thy sufferings? After thy resurrection, when thou wert entering on thy glory, what wonder if they discoursed of thy kingdom? But in the moment of thy shameful death, for a dying malefactor to speak of thy reigning, and to implore the remembrance of himself in a future state of blessedness—this is an act of such exalted faith as fills the whole soul with admiration.

O thou who wert thus brought into the true fold, how graciously wert thou called to take up thy cross and follow thy Master, as a partaker of his sufferings, a zealous witness to the truth, a patron of triumphant faith, a happy object of infinite mercy! “This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” Thou implorest a *remembrance*—thy Savior speaks of immediate possession: thou suest

for that remembrance as a favor to the *absent*—thy Savior speaks of thy presence with him : thou speakest of a kingdom—thy Savior of Paradise. As no disciple could be more faithful, so no saint could be happier.

Now, ye cruel priests and elders, ye are at leisure to feast your eyes with the sight ye so much longed for—ye have now the blood ye purchased. And is not your malice yet satisfied ? Is not this enough, without your taunts and insulting mockeries ? The people, the passers-by are taught to deride where they should adore. Many a tongue utters impious calumny against him in whom was no guile. A generous nature is more wounded by slanders than by the utmost severity of torture. What grief must have entered into thy heart, O blessed Lord, to hear these bitter reproaches from those whom thou camest to save ?

But alas, how small were these sorrows in comparison with that inward torment which thy soul felt in the apprehension of thy Father's wrath for the sins of the world now laid upon thy head ! While he looked upon thee with eyes of favor, what hadst thou to fear from earth or hell ? but when he turned his face from thee, though but for a moment, this, this was worse than death. No marvel if darkness was upon the whole earth when thy Father's countenance was hid from thee by the interposition of our sins. That word of thine, O Savior, was enough to bring the sun from heaven and to dissolve the face of nature, when thou criest out, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? " What pangs were these, which occasioned such a lamentation ! What could be more acceptable to thine enemies than to hear this language from thee ? Never could they have imagined the anguish of thy soul, if thine own lips had not expressed it—yet not regarding their exultation, thou pourest out thy sorrows—and where so much is uttered who can conceive what is felt ?

How is it then, O Savior, that thou makest this agonizing complaint? Hath thy God left thee? Art thou severed from him? Far, far be this thought removed from the hearts of thy servants! No more can thy blessed Father be separated from thee, than from his own essence. His union with thee is eternal—but he would for a season withdraw from thine human nature the influence of his comfort. Thou didst bear our sins in thine own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness. Hadst thou not been thus apparently forsaken, we had indeed perished without recovery. Thou wert made to be sin for us, who knewest no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in thee.

But while we are full of the sense of thy sufferings, let us not forget the riches of thy mercy. Thine enemies rejoice in thy death, and triumph in thy misery; thou implorest the compassion of heaven in their behalf—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” They blaspheme thee, thou prayest for them—they scorn, thou pitiest—they sin against thee, thou implorest forgiveness for them—they profess their malice, thou pleadest their ignorance—they claim the guilt of thy blood, thou art eager to deprecate it—they kill, thou suest for their remission and life. O compassion without example, without measure, worthy of the Son of God, worthy of the Savior of men!

Blessed Lord, that prayer could not but be heard. They who from ignorance and simplicity (not from inveterate malice) thus persecuted thee, find the happy consequences of thine intercession. Hence was it that three thousand souls were soon after converted at one sermon. It was not the speech of Peter, it was thy prayer which was thus effectual. Lord, what offence should we be unwilling to remit, when thou, while hanging on thy cross, couldst thus pray for the forgiveness of thy murderers and blasphemers?



O blessed Savior, thou art drawing near the end of thy painful sufferings, when, exhausted with labor and torment, thou criest out, "I thirst." Alas, how couldst thou do otherwise? The night had been passed in watching, in prayer, in agony, in thy conveyance from the garden to Jerusalem, from Annas to Caiaphas, from Caiaphas to Pilate, in tyrannous and unjust examinations, in buffetings and stripes. The day had been spent in thine arraignment, in thy removal from place to place, in scourgings, in shame and contumely, in loss of blood, in fainting under thy cross, in woundings and distension, in pain and passion. No marvel if thou didst suffer thirst amidst these complicated woes. Yet there was more in this drought than the mere craving of nature. It was no less requisite that thou shouldst thirst, than that thou shouldst die. Both were foretold by the same prophetic voice—both rested on the same authority. Now is that word accomplished, "All my bones are out of joint—my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my body. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, *and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws*, and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Had it not been to fulfil those Scriptures, of which one jot cannot pass away, though thou hadst felt this thirst thou wouldst not have declared it. Alas, what could it avail thee to confess thy misery to insulting enemies, whose delight was in that misery? Would they who pitied not thy bloodshed pity thy thirst? Not so thou spakest—not as expecting any favor, but as confirming the word of thy servants and establishing thy sacred truth.

And dost thou complain of the want of a few refreshing drops, blessed Lord, who sendest the springs into the rivers which run among the hills? who makest the waters that are above the firmament and those which are beneath it? O grant us to thirst after those never-failing streams of heavenly grace—let the water which thou shalt give us be unto us the wellspring of eternal life.

O Lord, how marvellous are the dispensations of thy providence! Thy murderers, while they seek to gratify their revenge, bear testimony to thy divine mission, and to the truth of thy word. In thy thirst "they gave thee vinegar to drink." This draught, O Savior, presented to thee by thine enemies, completed the sorrows thou wert to endure, and the prophecies thou wert to fulfil.

Now all thy labors are ended—the full consummation of all predictions, of all types and ceremonies, of all suffering, of all atonement, is effected and immediately proclaimed. Nothing now remains but a voluntary, sweet and heavenly resignation of thy blessed soul into the hands of thine eternal Father, and an instant entrance into rest, triumph, glory. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "IT IS FINISHED! *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" And he bowed his head and gave up the Ghost.



### 99—THE CRUCIFIXION\*—*continued.*

The atonement is completed. The wrath of heaven, the curse of the law, the power of sin, of death and hell, are annihilated by the glorious victory of the Son of God. The prophecies are fulfilled, the legal ceremonies are abolished, our everlasting peace is effected, the sufferings of our Redeemer are at an end.

Despised and rejected of men, without form or comeliness, the scorn of an ungrateful world, the object of malice, envy, and persecution, our Savior, from the commencement to the close of his life, had been familiarly

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\* From Bishop Hall's Passion Sermon.

acquainted with sorrow. All was love, and mercy, and condescension on his part—all was base and cruel ingratitude on the part of mankind. Behold him, rejected of the Bethlehemites, laid in a manger, persecuted by Herod, driven into Egypt, obscurely educated in a cottage of Galilee, tempted by Satan, derided by his own kindred, traduced by the Jews, persecuted by the Pharisees, betrayed by his own disciple, apprehended, arraigned, scourged, condemned, crucified.

Blessed Lord, the more we contemplate these wonders of thy mercy, the more are we lost in grateful amazement. Every circumstance adds to the ignominy of thy passion—to the glory of thy triumphant love.

All shame is heightened by public notice. Jerusalem was the *place* where thou wouldst suffer—Jerusalem, which thou hadst honored with thy presence, instructed with thine heavenly doctrine, astonished with thy miracles, bewailed with thy tears. The *time*, that of the pass-over—when all the inhabitants of Judea were summoned to perform their devotions in the temple. At this season, thou, the true Paschal Lamb, wert sacrificed for us. Thou didst not disdain to become an oblation for sin—to shed thine innocent blood for a guilty world.

While thus, O Savior, thou didst show forth the wonders of thy mercy, thy cup was embittered by the scorn and barbarity of thine adversaries. The inhuman Jews, the cruel soldiers triumphed over thy misery—thy blood would not satisfy them unless they filled thee with unjust reproach. Thine ears heard the blasphemy of the multitude—thy lips were defiled with gall—thy sacred body was mangled and tortured—and all this was but the external part of thy sufferings. Thine inward anguish as far exceeded these torments, as the sensibilities of the soul are more keen, more exquisite, than those of the body, the wrath of God was more grievous than all the malice of men—and *therefore* never was there sorrow

like unto thy sorrow. Thy faithful servants have been victorious in the midst of bodily torments no less acute than those which were inflicted on their Lord—but that face which was hidden from thee, shone benignantly on them and supported them under the severity of their trials. The chastisement of our peace was upon thee—the curse, denounced against our sins. Therefore was it, that thou didst offer up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save thee. Thou didst behold the wrath of thy Father, and therefore thou didst fear—thou didst feel the burden of our transgressions, and therefore wert thou grieved—but, well aware that we must have perished but for thy suffering, thy love surmounted every obstacle, beheld every danger with intrepidity.

In the utmost extremity of sorrow there is some relief from the compassion and sympathy of those we love. The Savior of mankind looked for some to take pity on him, but there was no man; neither found he any to comfort him. He trod the wine-press alone; none to accompany, none to assist him! Might the angel, who supported him in his agony, have soothed his anguish on the cross, there had been some alleviation of misery. But how can angels help whom God shall afflict? How much less can men, were they disposed to extend their charitable aid? But what *did* they? The soldiers mocked, buffeted, scourged him. The passers by reviled and laughed him to scorn. The Jews sought his destruction, and eagerly thirsted for his blood. His disciples to a man forsook him—one, the loudest in his protestations of zeal and fidelity, denied him with vehement execrations. Alas, who shall comfort the innocent Sufferer? His Father? Here, here was his hope. But even he delivers him into the hands of his enemies—"My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?" How could the heavens and the earth remain undissolved, while the Maker

of them thus poured forth his sorrows? They remained, but in some degree partook of his passion. The earth trembled and shook—the rocks rent—the graves opened—the sun itself withdrew its light, as not daring to behold this sad and fearful spectacle.

But now “it is finished”—and the storm wherewith the world itself was shaken is passed over. The Pharisees, soldiers, priests, executioners, nay, the powers of darkness themselves have labored to no purpose. Our Savior, upon his cross, is triumphant over them all. Our enemies are vanquished—the divine wrath is appeased—the charter of our salvation is renewed—the Mediator between God and man hath reconciled all things to himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven.

O Savior, shall we not strive for the mastery, that we may reign where thou reignest, having previously shared thy sufferings? Thou beholdest us from thine heaven—the reward is prepared; the day of deliverance is appointed; the hour of redemption draweth nigh. We, who now go forth weeping, shall doubtless come again with joy to the mansions of everlasting rest. The ransom is paid—there is neither accusation, nor judgment, nor eternal death for them that repent and obey the Gospel. It is God that justifieth—who is he that condemneth?

Let us follow thee, O gracious Savior, whether in life or in death. In our last moments let us remember thine. Teach us to commit our departing spirits into the hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Redeemer. Lord, the eye of faith beholds thee on thy cross—it beholds thee meekly bowing thine head as thou givest up the ghost, and all the fears of mortality vanish away. If thou didst freely lay down thy life for us, shall we repine and murmur when we are called upon to forsake the world and go unto our Father? Shall we consider death only as an object of horror, when thy sufferings have taken

away its sting and removed its malignity? Hadst thou not died, it had been still a tyrant: now it is a vanquished slave.

Happy are they, who during their life so walk with God as to resign themselves to his guardianship, with humble confidence, in the day of their dissolution. Fearful and miserable is the state of that man who must part with his soul to go he knows not whither. Surrender it he must. If Satan hath possessed it during life, can he hope that God will receive it at its departure? "The soul that sinneth it shall die."

Had we no soul, we could but lead a sensual life. O thou who pouredst out thy soul unto death, keep it ever in our remembrance that we are thine, and that we are on our progress to our Father's house. How safely, how confidently shall we pass through the gates of death under the guardianship and protection of that all-merciful Being who created, redeemed, renewed us—who doth protect, preserve, establish us—and who will bestow on us the crown of immortality!

Lord, while our souls dwell on earth they are subject to sorrow, distempered by passion, assaulted by sin, vexed by temptation. Above, in the cloudless regions of joy, are none of these enemies to our peace. How should it be otherwise? This is the place of our pilgrimage—that, our home: this, our wilderness—that, our Land of Promise: this, our house of bondage—that, our glorious kingdom, where the servants of Christ shall reign with their Lord for ever and ever.

Are we then unwilling to resign this frail spirit? Do we linger with fond anxiety in this world of sorrows? Where is our love, our hope, our joy in believing? Where our remembrance of his precious death, whom we now behold on his cross? O God, let us glorify thee on earth—let us finish the work which thou givest us to do. Then let us in humble tranquillity surrender into

thine hands that immortal gift which we received from thee—so shall we behold thy presence in righteousness, and when we awake after thy likeness, we shall be satisfied.

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100.—THE CRUCIFIXION.—*continued.*

And now, O blessed Jesus, how grievously have carnal eyes mistaken the circumstances and intention of this thy last and most glorious work? Our weakness could of itself see nothing but pain and ignominy—but our understandings, enlightened by thee, contemplate, in this thine humiliation, both honor and happiness. Lo, thou that art the Mediator between God and man, the reconciler of heaven and earth, art lifted up between earth and heaven that thou mightest deliver us from going down to the pit, having ransomed us from destruction. Thou, the great Captain of our salvation, the Conqueror of all the adverse powers of darkness, art exalted on thy cross as on a triumphal chariot, that thou mightest trample upon death and lead the adversaries of our salvation manacled after thee. Those arms, extended by the violence of thy persecutors, are stretched out to all mankind, embracing them with thy mercy and inviting them to the benefits of thine all-sufficient redemption. Even while thou sufferest, thou reignest. Can thine enemies disgrace thee with their miserable scoffs, their poor wretched indignities? Lo, the heavens declare thy righteousness, O Lord, and the universe shows forth thy power. The sun ceases to give light—the earth trembles as if it shuddered at the wrongs done to its Creator—the rocks are rent—the veil of the temple is torn in pieces—the whole frame of

nature acknowledges the dominion of that *Son of God* whom man despised.

Sin and hell have done their worst. Thou, O Savior, art in thy paradise, victorious over the malice of men and devils. Thy sacred remains are yet not free from violence and insult. The soldiers part thy garments, and cast lots for thy vesture; (glorifying thee, and fulfilling the Scripture by their proceedings.) The Jews sue for permission to show thee yet further indignities, but they sue in vain. Thy garments could not be whole—thy bones could not be broken—one inviolable decree overrules both. Thine enemies look on that lifeless body as if it were altogether at their mercy—little do they know the guard which is set on that precious body. In spite of all the gates of hell that word standeth sure, “A bone of him shall not be broken.”

Meanwhile, that no part of the divine prediction may remain unaccomplished, he whose bones might not be broken, shall be wounded in his flesh—he whose spirit was returned to God, must yield his last blood, even after his dissolution. “One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water; and he that saw it bare record.” Malice is wont to end with the life of its object—here it survives it. What means this superfluous barbarity? What commission was there for such an atrocious act? Pilate had given orders to break the bones of the living; not to pierce the side of the dead. How must indignation have been joined to sorrow in the hearts of those friends and followers of Christ who stood weeping by his cross, when they beheld this sacrilegious outrage! But, O God, when we look up to thee, and consider that thine infinite wisdom can turn apparent evil into certain good, while we abhor the cruelty of thine enemies, we bless and adore thy mercy—this very wound proclaims the sacred office of Christ and the truth of inspiration—*They shall*



look on *Him whom they have pierced*. Behold the Rock which was smitten, and the streams of life flowing out! Behold the fountain set open to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness! This is he who came by water and blood, even *Jesus Christ*—not by water only, but by water and blood. O Savior, by that water we are washed, by that blood we are redeemed. These, together with that spirit which thou didst surrender to thy Father, are the three *witnesses on earth*, 1 John, 5 : 7, 8, agreeing in one, and expressive of the sacred union of persons in heaven, who are co-eternal together and co-equal in the Godhead.

The Roman officer and his band who were placed as guards round the cross of Jesus, beheld the miraculous events which attended his crucifixion. They beheld them with unprejudiced eyes. They were free from all malice and bigotry, and therefore capable of a more ingenuous confession than the rancorous and cruel Jews—“Now when the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

No marvel that these men confessed as much—how could any spectator do otherwise than confess it? The evidence was sufficient to bring conviction to all mankind, and cast them at the feet of their crucified Redeemer. But some minds are obdurate against every generous impression—the cold heart of unbelief is proof against demonstration itself. While Pagans were melted, Jews (for the most part) continued impenitent and unrelenting.

Yet even of that nation some beholders, whom envy and partiality had not interested in this atrocious murder, were stricken with just astonishment, and smote their breasts, and with passionate gestures spake what their tongues durst not. How many must there needs be in

this universal concourse, of them whom he had healed of diseases, or fed by miracle, or convinced of sin, or benefited in some signal manner either in their own persons, or with respect to others dearer to them than themselves! These (though deeply affected with the shameful indignities offered to their acknowledged Messiah) are in some measure comforted, when they see those awful demonstrations of the Godhead of Him in whom they had believed. Distracted in their minds, while they compared those sufferings with that omnipotence, they trembled in the midst of their joy. As yet their faith was in its bud, their knowledge unconfirmed—"If he were the Son of God, how could he die? If he were not the Son of God, how could these things be?" Soon shall his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, remove these clouds of apprehension—now, their hearts could not but endure the conflict of thoughts hard to be reconciled. Meanwhile they glorify God, and standing amazed at what they behold, look forward with anxious expectation to the event which may follow.

But chiefly thou, O blessed mother of our Lord, how many swords were fastened in thy soul, while, standing by the cross of thy Son, thou didst behold him thus despitefully treated, thus nailed, thus bleeding, thus dying, thus pierced! How did thy troubled heart then recall the words reported to thee from heaven by an Archangel at the annunciation, that "He should be great, and should be called the Son of the Highest"—the prophecies concerning him—the adoration of the shepherds—the appearance of the star—the journey of the eastern sages—the wonders of his early years—those supernatural works of his, the solemn, the incontestable proofs of his divinity! How was every tender thought awakened in thy bosom by his care of thee in his dying moments! What deep horror possessed thy senses when thou heardest him exclaim, "My God, my God, why hast thou for-

saken me ?” But when, seeing the heavens bear a part with thee in thy distress, feeling the earth tremble no less than thyself, finding a dreadful concussion of the universe proclaim the deity of Him who would thus suffer and die, remembering his frequent predictions of drinking this bitter cup, and being thus baptized in blood—when, beholding these wonders, thou didst begin to collect thy scattered thoughts, thou couldst not but resume thy courage, and take comfort in the assurance of future blessedness. More than once had he predicted his victorious rising—he had openly professed that Jonas was his type, and had promised in three days to restore the ruined temple of his body. “The just shall live by faith.” O Mary, that faith of thine in his resurrection, and in his triumph over death, gives thee new life—cheers thy drooping soul—bids it rise superior to thy fears and sorrows—and represents to thee Jesus, whom thou now seest dead and despised, as living, immortal, glorious.

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### 101.—THE RESURRECTION.

True merit seeks not to obtrude itself on public notice; and till it be called on to the exercise of active virtue, remains in peaceful obscurity. During the life of the blessed Jesus no mention is made of Joseph of Arimathea—yet was he eminently rich, and wise, and good—a worthy, though bashful disciple of our Savior. Faith may be reserved, but will not be cowardly. Now he stands forth and craves the body of Jesus.

No doubt the centurion had related to Pilate the miraculous circumstances attending on the crucifixion of Jesus. His heart tells him he had done too much

already, in sentencing innocence to death. The body by his permission is taken down, wrapped in fine linen, curiously washed and embalmed. O Savior, thou who hadst not where to lay thy head when living, hast not a grave where thy lifeless remains may be deposited. The faithful Joseph resigns his tomb to thee who livest for ever and ever—whose soul is in Paradise, whose Godhead is every where. There, purely wrapped and sweetly embalmed, thy sacred body is committed to its repose.

And are ye not now at rest, ye Jewish rulers? Is not your hatred dead and buried with its object? Has not Pilate ministered enough to your envy and revenge? O rancor not to be terminated by death, malice and hostility that cannot die! The chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that this deceiver said while he was yet alive, *After three days I will rise again.* Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure till the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say to the people he is risen."

How full of terror and perplexity is guiltiness! These men were not more troubled with envy at Christ when alive, than with fear of his resurrection now he is dead. But what expedient can secure them? Pilate consented to his death—but who can keep him from rising! How fain would these Jews think him a deceiver, whom they knew to be no less true than powerful! Lazarus was in their thoughts—that man was no phantom—his death, his reviving were undeniable—Christ, who raised Lazarus, predicted his own resurrection—what need we any other witnesses than the mouths of these inveterate enemies? That which he would do, they confessed he foretold—that the truth of his word might answer the power of his deed, and that both might prove him to be the God of truth and power.

But now the sepulchre must be secured. A massy

stone, a strong guard must be provided—that stone must be sealed—that guard appointed under the direction of the Jews. O madness of vain men, who think by force or artifice to frustrate the counsels of the Almighty! How justly does the Lord of all the world laugh them to scorn in heaven, and delude them in their own devices! Blessed Savior, how convincing is the evidence given to thy resurrection by the malicious devices of thine enemies! How irrefragable a proof of thy rising is afforded by their fruitless and abortive stratagems!

The devout women who had wept at the cross of Jesus, passed their sabbath in grief, and hope, and wonder. They thought on the prodigies which attended his death—they sorrowed at the remembrance of his suffering—they treasured in their hearts the frequent and clear predictions of his resurrection. No sooner is it lawful for them to visit the sepulchre, than they repair thither (though the morning has scarcely dawned) to bestow their humble oblations. Had they been aware that Jesus was alive, how would they have hastened with redoubled ardor! *We* know that our Redeemer liveth—we know where he is. O Savior, how cold, how heartless is our love to thee, if we do not make speed to find thee in thy word and worship! if our souls do not fly up to thee in all holy affections, and seek thee where thou mayest be found!

At the tomb of Jesus every thing combined to fill these pious women with horror. The place was solitary and sepulchral—the time, night—the errand, the visitation of the dead body. All this is overcome by their zealous love. They had followed him in his sufferings when the disciples left him—they attended him to his cross weeping—they went with him to his grave and beheld how Joseph had laid him—even there they leave him not, but return once more to pay the last tribute of their love. They were not ignorant that both Joseph and Nicodemus had brought odors for those sacred remains—but

they rest not satisfied with the zeal and piety of others ; they bring an offering of their own. O Lord, what advantage is it to us that those around us are diligent in their duty to thee, if we are cold and heartless in thy service ? We may rejoice in their virtues—but if we add not our exertions to theirs, a day will come when we shall with horror see ourselves excluded from those regions of bliss to which others shall be called by their Lord.

The holy women, when they were present at the sepulture of Jesus, had noted the *inner* grave-stone, which Joseph fitted to the mouth of the tomb. This they are anxious to remove. “ Who shall roll away the stone ? ” That other more weighty load wherewith the vault was closed—the seal—the guard set upon both, came not into their knowledge. This was the private plot of the Jews and Pilate, beyond the reach of their thoughts.

How well do we succeed when we go faithfully in the discharge of our duty and leave the event to God ! Lo, his power hath removed that obstacle which his visitants actually feared, and that which they would have feared had they known of its existence. The stone is rolled away—the seal is broken—the massy rock is removed—the guards are dispersed. God sends an angel from above, the earth quakes beneath, the soldiers escape in terror and astonishment, the tomb is opened, Christ is risen, his enemies are confounded. Who are we, wretched mortals, that we should attempt to control the designs of our Creator ? There is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.

O marvellous pomp and magnificence of our Savior's resurrection ! The earth quakes, the angel appears, to demonstrate that universal power belonged to the divine person now rising. At the dissolution of his human nature was an earthquake—at its re-union is an earthquake. While he lay in the recesses of the tomb all was still—now, when he came, a Conqueror over death, “ the earth

trembled at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." O Savior, thou didst lie down in weakness, thou didst arise in power and glory—thou didst lie down as a man, thou didst arise as a God.

What a lively image hast thou given us of the dreadful majesty of the general resurrection and thy second appearance? Then, not the earth only, but the powers of heaven shall be shaken—not some few graves shall be opened, and some saints appear, but all the bars of death shall be broken, and all that sleep in their graves shall awake, and stand up from the dead before thee—not some one angel shall descend, but thousand thousands of those glorious spirits shall attend thee, the great Angel of the covenant. If these soldiers were so filled with terror at the earthquake and the appearance of an angel that scarcely any breath remained in them, how shall thine enemies, O Lord, abide that day when the earth shall reel to and fro, the elements shall be in flames around them, and the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll?

The terrified soldiers saw the countenance of the angel vivid and radiant as the lightning—both they and the women beheld his garments shining and white as snow—such a presence became his errand. In the passion of our Lord the sun was darkened, and all things were clothed in heaviness. At his resurrection the inhabitants of heaven celebrated his triumph with suitable tokens of festal joy. They could not but partake of our happiness to see the work of man's redemption thus completed. If there be joy among the angels of God at the conversion of one sinner, what must be their rapture when a world of sinners were ransomed from death and restored to their salvation? It is their perpetual employment to praise thee, O blessed Jesus—behold a new song is put into their mouths: thou, the God of light, hast vanquished the powers of darkness: thou, the Lord of Life, hast swallowed up death in thy glorious victory.

Certainly, if heaven can be capable of any increase of joy, never had those blessed spirits so great a subject of exultation as on this day of thy rising. How much more should we, whose nature thou didst assume, for whose sake and in whose stead thou didst suffer and die, whose souls are delivered by thy death, whose bodies shall be raised by thy resurrection, how much more should we be overjoyed at the contemplation of this work of divine power and inconceivable mercy!

Behold now, though weak and insufficient of ourselves, yet in the confidence of our Savior's resurrection we dare boldly challenge and defy the adversaries of our salvation. In spite of all their power and all their malignity, we are safe.

Is it sin that threatens us? Lo, our Redeemer by his rising proclaims our deliverance. Our Surety was cast into the prison of his grave—had not the utmost farthing been paid he could not have come forth. He *is* come forth—the debt is discharged and cancelled.

Is it the wrath of God? Wherefore is that but for sin? If our sin be expiated, that peril is at an end. If our Savior hath suffered for us, shall we yet suffer the penalty in ourselves? Infinite justice will not be doubly paid. “It is Christ that died—*Yea rather, that is risen.* Who is he that condemneth?”

Is it death itself? Our Savior overcame death by dying, and triumphed over him, in returning from the grave. How can we fear a conquered enemy? What harm is there in the serpent but for his sting? The sting of death is sin—*that* is taken away by the power of our Redeemer—it cannot now harm us, though we carry it in our bosom.

O great and glorious Savior, we bless thee for thy death, but we bless thee more for thy resurrection. Thy death was a work of wonderful humility—of infinite mercy: thy resurrection was a work of infinite power—



of transcendent majesty. In the one was human weakness—in the other, divine omnipotence. In the one, thou didst die for our sins—in the other, thou didst rise again for our justification.

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102.—THE RESURRECTION.—*continued.*

The repentant Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved hastened, as well as the pious women, to the tomb which Joseph of Arimathea had appropriated to our Lord. They hastened, but they found only the spoils of death—the grave-clothes wrapped up—the napkin which had been about the head of Jesus folded together and laid in a place by itself. They saw and they returned in amazement.

In their speed to the sepulchre, society had been forgotten—they flew on the wings of zeal to see what was become of their Master. Their desire is equal—but John, with the activity of youth, arrives before his fellow-apostle. Standing aloof, he contemplates the sepulchre—Peter first enters into its recesses. Such was their happy competition, each endeavoring to be most ardent in the inquiry after Christ! Yet still is their faith unsettled and feeble—they knew not the Scriptures—they went away more astonished than confident—more full of wonder, than of belief.

The apostles are gone—but Mary Magdalene remains at the mouth of the cave, weeping. As she weeps she stoops and looks down into the sepulchre of her Lord.

Holy desires cannot fail of answerable success. There she sees two glorious angels, the one sitting at the head, the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus

had lain. Peter and John were newly come out of the sepulchre—they saw not these celestial visitants. That unexpected radiance presents itself to the eyes of the devout penitent, whose heart was so taken up with thoughts of her Savior, that even this sudden wonder cannot interrupt her tears, or constrain her to silence. To their question “*Why weepest thou?*” her ready answer proclaims, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” God and his angels take notice of every tear of true devotion. Of whom dost thou complain, O devout soul? Who hath removed thy Savior but the power of his own Godhead? Turn back thine eyes and see Him standing by thee whose absence thou lamentest! She turned about and saw him—but she knew not that it was Jesus.

For a while the Lord of life conceals himself from his faithful convert—he beholds her tears—he hears her importunity and inquiries. At last (as the patriarch could not contain himself before his brethren, Gen. 45 : 1, 2, 3,) the compassion of Jesus turns the sorrow of this mourner into joy. He saith unto her, “*Mary!*” She was used to the name, to the address, to the accent. Before, her Lord had spoken to her as a stranger—now, as a friend, as a Master. The good Shepherd calleth his sheep by name, and they know his voice.

She turneth herself and saith unto him, “*Rabboni,*” which is to say, “*Master.*” Her eyes had before been fixed on the angels—this word directs them to the sacred object of her solicitude. We do not rightly apprehend thee, O Lord, if any creature in heaven or earth call away our attention from thee. The angels were bright and glorious—thy appearance was even now that of a servant—yet when she heard thy voice, she turned from the splendid vision, saluted thee with the name of Master, and fell down before thee with admiration and delight.

But wherefore, O Savior, dost thou check these effusions of joy? Wherefore dost thou say to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father?" Was it that her thoughts were fixed too intently on thy bodily presence? Was it that her eagerness seemed to imply a fear of disappointment, as if she beheld only a visionary form, which was not to make a lengthened abode upon earth before its ascension to glory? O Lord, even our well-meant zeal in seeking and adoring thee may not be faultless. If we have known thee after thy flesh, henceforth we know thee so no more. Could we say, "Here didst thou dwell, here didst thou take thy repose, here wert thou crucified, here buried, here didst thou arise, hence didst thou depart unto thy Father," we should dwell with delight on the memorials of thy presence—but if we so fix our contemplations on thee, as not to look to the *spiritual* part of thy benefits, the power and virtue of thy resurrection, our knowledge is vain and unfruitful—we have need to be instructed again in the first principles of the Gospel of Christ.

No sooner art thou risen, than thou speakest of ascending—that is the consummation of thy glory, and of ours in thee. "Go to my brethren and say, *I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*"

To whom dost thou send her? "Go, tell my brethren." Alas, who were thy brethren? Had not these men forsaken, denied, abjured thee? O admirable humility! O infinite mercy! At first they were thy *servants*—afterwards thy *friends*—now, disregarding their imperfect services, thou dost not disdain to call them *brethren*. When we consider our offences, they are heinous—but when we look at thy mercy, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Yet even now, sinners as we are, we are thy brethren—brethren in thee, who art ascending for us—in thee, who hast made thy Father our Father, thy God our God.

The disciples, whose flight had scattered them at the seizure of their Master, were now re-assembled in secret. Still were they fearful—still were the Jews malicious. With what joy and wonder did they receive the tidings of their Master's resurrection and life! Lo, while their thoughts and discourse are taken up with so happy a subject, his own miraculous presence bids their senses witness his reviving, and their own happiness. When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and said, "Peace be unto you!" O Savior, they who once trembled, supposing thee a spirit, when before thy crucifixion thou didst walk upon the waters, could not now behold thee returning from the grave without astonishment, and even terror. Thy mercy hastens to dispel these fears—after thy wonted greeting, thou showest them thy hands and feet, stamped with the impression of thy recent sufferings. Thy respiration argues the truth of thy life. Thou breathest on them as man—thou givest them thy Spirit as God—and as God and man thou sendest them on the great errand of thy Gospel.

All the mists of doubt, fear and ignorance, are now dispelled—the sun breaks out at once, and darkness is removed for ever. They were glad when they saw thee, O Lord! They remembered the marvellous works which thou hadst done—the proof of thy deity gave them confidence, and thy presence filled them with joy.

We cannot but be losers by our absence from religious assemblies. Where wert thou, Thomas, when the rest of that sacred band were met together? Had thy fear put thee to so distant a flight that thou wert not yet returned to thy fellows? Wherefore wert thou not present, to partake of that divine inspiration which taught them to rejoice in God their Savior? They said unto thee, "We have seen the Lord." Is there no certainty but in thine own senses? These tongues are commis-

sioned to convert a world—and art thou the first to refuse thine assent to their word? Had not thy divine Master foretold to thee with the rest, that he must be crucified and the third day rise again? Is any thing beyond the reach of divine omnipotence?

Blessed Lord, how justly mightest thou have left this man to his pertinacity? It had been no marvel if he had been suffered to remain in this unbelief. But, O thou good Shepherd, who wouldst leave the ninety and nine to go after one that was gone astray in the wilderness, how careful wert thou to bring this wanderer back again into thy fold! Thy disciples were once more so met together, such was the season, such the place, when (that unbelieving apostle being present) thou didst stand in the midst, didst single him out from his fellows, and offering him the demonstration he required, didst exhort him “not to be faithless, but believing.”

Behold, thy mercy as well as thy power hath melted the heart of thy servant. “Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” The sense of their Master’s omniscience spares the labor of all further disquisition. He believed, and therefore he spake—“My Lord and my God!”

Happy for us was that distrust which occasioned so perfect evidence of Christ’s rising, whereon all our salvation depends, and produced that clear and explicit attestation of his divinity who thus arose. Thomas acknowledges not only the resurrection, but the Godhead of Jesus, and his own happy interest in both. And now, if they are blessed who have not seen and yet have believed, blessed is he also, who having thus seen, has thus believed—and blessed art thou, O God, who out of evil canst produce good, and canst make even the infirmities of thy children subservient to thy glory, the welfare of thy Church, the comfort and edification of mankind. Amen.

## 103.—THE ASCENSION.

Had the Savior of mankind considered nothing but his own glory, he would instantly on quitting his grave have repaired to his celestial throne—but he, who for our sakes vouchsafed to descend from heaven to earth, would have due regard to the welfare of his servants as to the time of his return. His death had troubled the hearts of many; and thoughts of diffidence had siezed the holiest breasts—he therefore condescended to remain upon earth till his disciples had received such proofs of his resurrection as incredulity itself could neither gainsay nor resist.

Of all this period, O Savior, thou only canst give an account—it is not for our sinful and corruptible nature to trace the ways of immortality. Yet often wert thou pleased to manifest thyself unto men, not only appearing to thy disciples, but renewing to them the familiarity of thy wonted intercourse, walking, eating, conferring with them, teaching them the things which concerned the kingdom of God, and at last, before thy departure, assembling them for a solemn and affectionate benediction. “When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.” O happy parting, fit for the Savior of mankind, suitable to that divine conversation, to that succeeding glory!

Lord, whither didst thou ascend from mount Olivet but to thy celestial throne? Thou art gone up in triumph, and hast demonstrated thine universal dominion. The earth confessed thee her Lord, when at thy voice she restored thy beloved Lazarus, when she trembled at thy passion, and surrendered the bodies of thy departed saints—the sea bare witness to thee when it hushed its

waves in obedience to thy word, when it yielded its abundant stores at thy command, when it became a pavement to thy feet and to the feet of thy disciple. Hell found and acknowledged thee in that thou didst vanquish the prince of darkness, even him that had the power of death. It now remained that as Lord of heaven thou shouldst ascend to the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory; that as all power was given unto thee, so every tongue might confess thy supremacy in heaven, in earth, and under the earth.

But how, O blessed Savior, didst thou ascend? While they beheld thou wert taken up—so taken up as that the act was thine own, the power of that act only thine. Thou who descendest wert the same who didst ascend, still and ever the Master of thine actions. Thou didst lay down thine own life—thou didst raise up thine own body—thou didst carry up thy glorified nature and didst place it in heaven. The angels *attended* thee, they did not *aid* thee—thou didst not stand in need of a fiery chariot to waft thee to thy glory. As thou didst exalt thyself, thou wilt hereafter exalt thy faithful people. Thou shalt change this vile body that it may be made like unto thy glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby thou art able to subdue all things to thyself.

As after thy resurrection thou madest choice of those eyes whom thou wouldst bless with the sight of thee, manifesting thyself to five hundred at once, but avoiding the presence of thine enemies and murderers: so in thine ascension thou didst select a sufficient number of witnesses to attest thy miraculous reception into thy kingdom. They only beheld thine exaltation who had shared thy state of deep humility. Thus dost thou still deal with thy servants, O Lord, and we rejoice in the condition. If we will converse with thee in thy lowly estate on earth, partaking of the afflictions of the Gospel,

we shall in thine own time be made happy by the sight and participation of thy glory.

What a sight was this of joyful assurance, of spiritual consolation! Behold the Savior of mankind rising insensibly from mount Olivet, taking leave of his admiring disciples with gracious looks, with uplifted hands, with heavenly benedictions! O how unwilling did their eager eyes recede from so blessed an object! How unwelcome was that cloud which interposed itself between them and their Master, leaving behind it a glorious splendor, as the bright track of his ascension! With what gestures, what exclamations of attentive wonder did these transported beholders follow thee their triumphant Savior, as if they would have looked through that cloud which hid thee from them, to the empyreal heaven!

But oh what tongue of the highest Archangel can express the welcome of thee, the Lord omnipotent, into those blessed regions of immortality! God ascended with a shout, and the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. If, when he brought his only-begotten Son into the world, he said, "Let all the angels worship him," much more now, that he ascends on high, and hath led captivity captive, hath he given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. If the heavenly host rejoiced at the moment of his birth, on his entrance into that state of humiliation and infirmity, with what congratulations did they receive the Conqueror of hell and death, returning from the complete achievement of man's redemption? "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors—and the *King of Glory* shall come in." Thousand thousands ministered unto him, ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honor,



and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.”

And why do we not join the celestial choir? Why are we not filled with transports of holy joy, to behold our human nature thus associated with the divine, to see the *Son of Man* exalted above all the powers of heaven, adored by angel and archangel, crowned with inexpressible and eternal majesty?

Lo, for our sakes, thou, the forerunner and Captain of our salvation, art entered into thy glory, and preparest the way for thy servants. How studiously should we follow thee in faith and love, in humility and long-suffering—how ardently should we aspire after the mansions of bliss! O teach us to follow thee in the conflict, that we may partake of thy triumph, and may sit down with thee on thy glorious throne.

Among the multitude of angels who witnessed thine ascension, some are commissioned to attend on thine astonished disciples, and to comfort them with the assurance of thy return. Arrayed in robes of light and joy, they came to testify that thy task was done, thy victory accomplished, and the crown placed upon thy head. And shall not our transports equal those of thine angels, when with the eye of faith we see thee thus ascended? It is for us, O Savior, that thou art gone to prepare a place in those blissful abodes—it is for us that thou makest thine all-powerful intercession. While thou wert on earth thou didst pray to thy Father that they whom he had given thee might behold thy majesty—whither thou art gone, though we cannot follow thee now, yet we shall follow thee afterwards. In the assured hope of future blessedness we are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. This is our God—we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord—we have waited for him—we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” O ye blessed spirits, what eye could but be intent on the path whereby the Son of God was ascended to his throne? How could they do otherwise than fix their admiring looks on that cloud which had received their Master out of their sight? Never could they have gazed so eagerly as now. Their treasure was in heaven—their heart was there also. Not with any intention of conveying reproof, not with any design of checking the zeal and fidelity of the disciples, did ye address them in this language. Ye would have them still behold him, but with the eye of faith, and of hope, and of joy. *“This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Look not after him, O ye wondering disciples, as so departed that ye shall see him no more. If he be gone, he is not lost. Those heavens which have received him shall restore him. Ye have seen him ascend on the chariot of a bright cloud—and in the clouds of heaven ye shall see him descend at the last day to judge the world. He is gone—rejoice that ye have an Advocate in heaven. If it be sorrow to part with him, it is comfort and felicity to meditate on the place whither he is gone. If his absence be grievous, his return shall be happy and glorious.”*

“Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!” in the mean time, neither can heaven separate thee from thy children, nor can earth detain us from thee—raise up our souls to a life of faith with thee—let us ever enjoy thy conversation while we expect thy return.

THE END.











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