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SERMONS
PREACHED
IN
CHRIST CHURCH
SALFORD
BY
HUGH STOWELL
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SERMONS

PREACHED IN CHRIST CHURCH, SALFORD.



S E R M O N S

PREACHED IN CHRIST CHURCH, SALFORD.

BY THE

REV. HUGH STOWELL, M.A.,

RECTOR, HONORARY CANON OF CHESTER, RURAL DEAN, AND CHAPLAIN TO
THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.

LONDON: WILLIAM TEGG.

1869.



TO THE READER.

As the late Rev. Canon Stowell's preaching was invariably without notes, it is necessary to state that these Sermons are published from the revised verbatim short-hand notes of Mr. T. S. Hackett. In an authority to publish, given by Canon Stowell to Mr. Hackett, the following instructions occur:—"As you are accustomed to composition, you will make your reports correct in grammar, clear in connection, and accurate in Scripture quotation." The revision of this volume has been proceeded with in the spirit of the request thus made. In other respects the Sermons appear as they were preached.

The following observations on modern preaching will form an appropriate introduction to these Sermons. They were made by the late Canon Stowell in the course of one of his Wednesday evening lectures on the First Epistle to the Corinthians:—

"Many teachers now, as in the days of the apostles,

set up a show of philosophy, and seek to preach learned, critical, and original sermons—something new; they are not satisfied to teach the things the apostles taught in simplicity; but, after all, there is no new truth to teach, it is the old truth reiterated and renewed in its power and influence on the soul, but the old truth still. It is the same Saviour; it is the same Holy Spirit; it is the same precious blood that cleanseth from all sin; it is the same full, perfect, and sufficient oblation, satisfaction, and atonement; it is the same blessed fellowship with the Father and the Son; it is the same glorious hope of everlasting life; they are the same commandments of God; these are the same truths after all, however they may be variously illustrated, however they may be brought into new lights and new views, and they must form the theme of our ministry if it is unto salvation.”

JANUARY, 1866.





CONTENTS.

SERMON	PAGE
I. DIVINE GUIDANCE AND LEADING	1
II. THE HIDDEN LEAVEN	13
III. TRUE HEROISM: COUNTING THE COST	23
IV. GOD OVER ALL	36
V. OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR LANGUAGE: IDLE WORDS	50
VI. UNBELIEF	61
VII. THE STRONGHOLD OF THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL	72
VIII. PERFECT PEACE	84
IX. THE SPIRITUALITY AND SIMPLICITY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP	93
X. ABIDING SATISFACTION: ANNUAL ADDRESS TO THE YOUNG	102
XI. THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD	114
XII. LOOK TO THE END: A CONTRAST	125
XIII. ORDERING THE CONVERSATION ARIGHT	136
XIV. PRAYER	147
XV. THE INWARD ILLUMINATION OF THE SOUL	158
XVI. THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH	171
XVII. FAITH ASSURED AND AUGMENTED	181
XVIII. DIVINE AGENCY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY	192

SERMON	PAGE
XIX. GOD'S TESTIMONY TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, NO. 1 .	202
XX. GOD'S TESTIMONY TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, NO. 2 .	214
XXI. SELF-IGNORANCE : ITS INEXCUSABLENESS	226
XXII. SELF-IGNORANCE : ITS CAUSES	235
XXIII. SELF-IGNORANCE : ITS FOLLY, GUILT, AND PERIL .	244
XXIV. THE LOVE OF GOD	256
XXV. THE LIBERTY OF THE SPIRIT	267
XXVI. FERVENT LOVE OF THE BRETHREN	276
XXVII. ENDURING TO THE END	287
XXVIII. THE ARGUMENT FOR A JUDGMENT TO COME . .	297
XXIX. THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION	311
XXX. HEAVENLY REST	320





I.

DIVINE GUIDANCE AND LEADING.

“For Thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me.”—PSALM xxxi. 3.

WHAT a helpless, hopeless thing would a ship be, launched forth upon the deep without a helm, and without a pilot ; how it would be drifted about by every current, and tossed to and fro by every wind and wave ; how speedily it must be driven amid the shoals, or dashed upon the rocks ; how short would be its course ; how powerless it would be, and how inevitable would be its wreck and ruin ! No better is man, launched forth on the waves of this troublesome world. Without a Divine helmsman, how must he inevitably be drifted into danger, and betrayed into ruin, if he follows his own wit, and will, and wisdom ! The very essence of all Christian life is to walk by faith and not by sight, and the very essence of Divine wisdom in heaven-taught man is to “trust in the Lord” with all his might, and not to trust in himself, not to trust in his own understanding. David had been tossed by much chastisement and distress, he had experienced much self-confidence, and had gone astray like a sheep that was lost, and the Lord had restored him. His soul had been taught, therefore, and we need to be taught continually, to offer up the beautiful prayer to which we have just been listening, familiar to our ears, but far too little upon our hearts, “For Thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me.”

The words offer for our investigation these three points,—*The petition*:—*the plea*:—and *the way in which we get a sure answer to the petition*. Let us look to Him for His blessed Spirit to enlighten our minds, to open our understandings, and to incline our hearts, that we may adopt the prayer for our daily and for our hourly guidance, for Christ's sake.

The petition is very short and simple, and very replete with holy meaning: "Lead me, and guide me." To offer it aright, so that it shall not be a mockery, a man should be profoundly impressed with the conviction that he cannot guide and lead himself. You might suppose this was a very easy lesson to learn, and one that man could not live beyond youth or childhood in order to be taught it. It would be so if we were not slow learners, and prone to unbelief. There are few things we are so proud of as that we have least reason to confide in—our own judgment and our own wisdom; but he that so trusts is a fool. You will find a man that so trusts more sensitive on this point than any other, and even a youth will set up his opinion against that of his father. Perhaps there never was a period in the history of this country when young men were so disposed as at present, to set at naught the opinions of others for their own vain notions and fancied imaginations. And how many make wreck and ruin, for time and eternity, because of this self-will and because of this self-dependence? Vain man! what a fool he is, when he can see how many go astray following their own imaginations, and directing themselves till many a man awakes and find himself a wreck. If a man leans on God, he cannot wreck; but he is never safe walking in the things of himself—he is never going right while he fancies all is of himself. If a man comes to some measure of understanding of what is his predicament here, of what are his circumstances here, and of what are to be the issues of his brief sojourn here—of the snares and perils,

temporal and spiritual, that compass him about—he feels that God's guidance is necessary, and he sees that the plausible snares that hide themselves are false lights, that shine as though they were stars of heaven, but are in reality lights from hell, bedizening themselves as lights from heaven. Till a man comes to have a sense and feeling of this, he never awakes. He ought to feel, "I dare not trust myself." What do you know what an hour may bring forth? what if you turn down one street rather than another? what may be the result of one rash step, of one unguarded word, of one evil thought, of one covetous desire, of one dark purpose?—how may these issue to us who are travellers for eternity? Have we no destinies that are, as it were, trembling in the balance? And is not life, in everything a man does, fructifying for the harvest of judgment? Will not the least as well as the greatest things go into the great account? Can a man look into his past history, can he look into his secret history, can he look above, can he look below, can he look beyond, can he look to heaven, can he look to hell, can he look to death, can he look to judgment, and not tremble at the thought of being left to himself, and allowed to have his own will, and to take his own course, and to have his own choice, and to follow himself? The greatest curse that God can give a man is, to "let him alone." Surely any man who has any thoughtfulness or sense of his own responsibility, and of a dread immortality, will tremble to be left to himself! We take things to be little and unimportant, but there is nothing little in the history of an immortal being. Unimportant when we have such a brief space to decide how we shall stand at last in the account before our God. There cannot be a more salutary lesson than this, for a man to learn to fear himself, and to distrust his own judgment. There is a confidence in our natural judgment which is manly and wise, for without it there could be no decision of

character ; but this is different from that proud, overweening dependence upon ourselves, that is so pernicious, and that ruins so many thousands. We must go to the mercy-seat and ask wisdom, where it is never asked earnestly and refused ; we must ask for guidance where it is never sought earnestly but it is afforded. There must be a deep conviction of the need of guidance, or we cannot pray in sincerity and truth, "Lead me, and guide me." And there must be no less a firm conviction that the great God, as revealed in Christ Jesus, does interpose in the affairs of little man, and that He does condescend to guide and lead all who trust in Him. If there be not this faith, why do we pray? We do not pray ; we utter the language, but we breathe not the spirit of devotion. God is listening with His omniscient ear to what is passing in the thoughts, and the feelings, and the mind. There is often the word of prayer where the spirit is wanting. It is not sufficient to have the sacrifice and the wood for the burnt offering, if the altar of God is not there. There must be the heavenly fire that kindles the offering, and turns it into an acceptable sacrifice. And yet how many there are amongst us—let each one judge himself—that will live on from morning till night, and awake the next morning and go on to another night, attending to their earthly affairs, to their plans and purposes, to their business and pleasures, to their relative ties and their social enjoyments, and never look up to God to direct them in their walks, but act as if they were masters of themselves ! Is that rational ? is it wise ? is it safe ? What is good that man does not have God's guidance in ? What is safe that he does not have His direction in ? "Without Him," as it is beautifully said in one of the lovely prayers of our church, "nothing is strong, nothing is holy," and it might be added, nothing is wise, and nothing is safe. Brethren, is there a man amongst us who would be so atheistic as to say that God is not in everything ;

that He is not over everything, and through everything; that He not less decides the little stars in their order, than he does the archangel's flight, and the glorious sun's career? Yet, men are so sottish, so sunken, so lost to intellect and intelligence, that they would venture to say that God is not in everything. If He *is* in everything, why is He to be forgotten in so many things, and remembered only on Sunday, or in the church, or at the family prayer, or when you read the Bible? One said to me once, who used to hear me, "I like very well, Mr. Stowell, to hear you enforce religion in its proper place, in the church, at the Sacrament, on the Sunday; but why do you carry it into the counting-house, and the market-place, and everywhere? Surely that is impossible and fanatic." When I had the opportunity of speaking to him, I said, "Where ought not God to be remembered?" He was silent, and I added, "Another question may resolve this—Where is not God present? Where He is not present, let Him be forgotten; but where He is present, let Him be remembered." Will God exempt the counting-house, the market-place, the scenes of amusement, the places of pleasure and indulgence; will He exempt *them* from examination in the great day? No, brethren: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." He is "about thy path, and about thy bed and spiest out all thy ways." There is "not a word of thy tongue," there is not a thought of thy heart, but He knoweth them altogether. He has compassed thee behind and before; therefore, in every place, and at all times,—if not in immediate recollection, at least in constant dependence,—acknowledge the ever-present God.

Then, brethren, there must be, in order to this full faith and conviction, expectation that God will direct us. There are some who do ask God to guide them, but never wait to be guided. They ask, and go away before they have any

answer ; they do not wait to hear what they are to do ; they do not look out for guidance ; and, if they do get it, they often forestall it. I have had persons come to ask for counsel, and I have been inclined to say, “ Do you want counsel or countenance ; do you want sanction for that which your conscience tells you is not right, or do you want counsel ? ” Many go to God more for countenance than for counsel ; they pray that God will connive at what is wrong. Be assured of it, it is not enough to wait *on* the Lord, we must wait *for* the Lord. It is not enough to go to the counsel-chamber and ask the infinitely wise to direct us ; we must be afterwards on the watch tower, and wait and watch for what He shall answer when He speaketh.

There is much more that might be added as to this prayer, “ Lead me, and guide me.” If you should pass lightly over it, you might suppose the two words “ lead ” and “ guide ” are identical ; but you should never pass lightly over any word that is inspired, for there is no tautology, you may be sure, and no verbiage, but every word is full of weight and wisdom. There is a beautiful description here of the little child. A child is going along a dark path, and knows that it is dangerous to go alone ; but he says, My mother knows the road, and will guide me. But that is not enough,—he says, My mother will lead me. He wants the helping hand as well as the directing eye ; he wants to be sustained in following the guidance, as well as to have it set before him. It is far easier to know what is right than to do it ; it is far easier to perceive the right path than to follow it ; yea, it is so difficult to follow it, that guidance itself is insufficient. There must be, as it is beautifully described in another psalm, the leading : “ My soul followeth hard after Thee ”—there is the guidance ; “ Thy right hand upholdeth me ”—there is the leading. The child cannot follow in the way unless the mother sustains it. Its footsteps are too tottering

and treacherous to take the right way, except the leading hand sustain and guide the feeble steps of the child. And what are we at the best but helpless children, running along, tottering and staggering? Alas! "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe," is as fit a prayer as "Lead me and guide me."

But we hasten to *the plea*. What is it men plead with the great God? We hear men say that they have done their best. We very often hear poor people in sorrow say, "I do my best." There never was an individual, from Adam's fall to this day—*never*, that did his best. It requires but little wisdom to find out that men do not do their best. Scarcely a day passes but they get into snares. A man goes to public-houses and makes a brute of himself. Does *he* do his best, when he cannot abstain and dash the poisoned cup from his lips? It is false to say that that man does his best! He prays, "Lead me not into temptation," and the next day he rushes into it. Ah, you will have no excuse at the last; you will be driven out of your pleas, and you will be shut up to the one plea, "For Thy name's sake." What is the beautiful meaning of this? We use it in the lovely prayers of our church every Sunday. The name of God is the revelation of God; not God as He is, for no one knows God, but as He makes himself known. God may be understood, and seen, and felt by us; that is, the name of God. Now, when we plead His name, we must remember what His name is. "God is love." Because Thou art love, "guide and lead me." "Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." Then there is God revealed in Jesus. Jesus is the name of God; "Immanuel, God with us;" "God manifest in the flesh." Poor, dark man out of Christ, is as the sun in noonday splendour, hidden with his own light; but in Christ, as the sun with the cloud that shields his beams, but does not extinguish the light. In this Jesus, God may be known and felt; therefore we plead the name that

is "above every name" in heaven and in earth. "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name he shall give it you." For Thy name's sake, for Jesus' sake, the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; a pilgrim on this earth, He shared our sorrows, He felt our difficulties, He encountered our temptations, and

"He knows what sore temptation means;"

and what distresses, and anguish, and perplexities mean—for His sake lead us, and guide us!

Then the prayer is especially the prayer of the child of God. It is said of Saul, who kicked against the pricks, "Behold he prayeth." Therefore, there is a peculiar force and beauty in these words from the lips of a child of God. It is as if a child said to his father, "Father, if you lead me, and I go wrong, you will bear the reproach and the blame as well as I." Is it not for the father's honour that he should do his duty? and is it not so with Him who is not ashamed to call us brethren? "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Of him it is said, "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Then, is it not a name involved in the faithfulness He has promised to His people? and is He not faithful to his promises? is He not true to them that trust in Him? and will he not remember them in the hour of need? "Guide me, and lead me, for Thy name's sake." Has not the servant of God strength, so to speak, in the bowels of His compassion, and he will evermore be zealous for His honour and glory? How beautifully has He promised, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." There is no doubt, there is no condition,—there it is, only ask with the heart, and thou shalt find it.

But I hasten, brethren, to a very practical point. How shall we know the guidance and leading of God? No doubt many good men have often made a mistake and gone wrong; no doubt many men have thought they have been right, and could prove that they have been right by their own imaginations and inclinations, and therefore it might be said, has God been faithful and fulfilled His word? I say, yes; "let God be true, but every man a liar." Do you know all that was in their minds? do you know all that was in their hearts? do you know whether they *did* wait for God's answer? do you know whether they consulted with Him, or with their own desires? I may just remind you, how, if you do pray in truth and earnestness, you may expect God to answer you. First, you may by His providence. The providence of God means the superintending wisdom with which He directs the whole current of events, and makes "the very wrath of man to praise Him, and restrains the remainder of wrath;" out of evil bringing forth good, and confounding His enemies by making them subservient to His plans. This providence is hard to read at times, and hieroglyphical are the characters; but there are certain indications when a man waits upon God to tell Him whether to take this step or that; whether to forego this purpose, or adopt it; whether to go to this place, or to stop from it; whether God smiles upon him, or frowns upon him; whether God approves of the steps he has taken, or he incurs His displeasure. There are sure indications and signs, and a man need not look to visions or miracles, or the supernatural, for the path he is to pursue. The Lord hath "gone before thee," whether it be in thy pleasure or thy business; and what is His beautiful promise? "I will bring the blind by a way they knew not." "This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." But, remember, the providence of God is to fallen

man no better than a beautifully-constructed lantern that has no light in it. There must be a light in the lantern before it can guide, and the blessed Word of God furnishes the wick and the oil for the lamp. Scripture is the commentary for providence; without it all is dark, but with it the darkness is illuminated, confusion shapes itself into harmony, and we have some foresight of what we shall behold when we look, as the angel did in the apocalyptic vision, and see the light of the holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, and looking from the battlements upon the vast and stupendous scene as it now seems, we shall see order emerge out of chaos, and light out of darkness. "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Oh, how beautiful the words of the lively oracles of Scripture! God speaks to man as a friend, when man unloads his heart. When a man falls down and prays in truth, he talks with God; when he sits down with the oracles of God before him, God speaks to him; thus we ask, and He answers; thus we commune with Him, and if you heard His voice, as Moses did trembling on the top of Sinai, or as His disciples did on Calvary, it would not be more surely the voice of God than it is when you read His Word in a prayerful, humble, teachable spirit. We want this simple faith. And, brethren, to take up the figure again of the dark lantern, as the Word of God is the wick and the oil, so the Spirit of God is the heavenly fire that kindles the wick and absorbs the oil, and makes the light shine clear and steady. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." How much too little the blessed and Holy Ghost the Comforter, co-essential and co-equal with the Father and the Son, to whom we ascribe in the church

continually glory as to the Father and the Son, "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end"—how much too little we remember that blessed and Divine personage, whose place and part in our salvation is not a whit less essential than that of the eternal Father, and that of the everlasting Son; for without the Spirit no man can say with faith and truth that Jesus is the Lord, and without the Spirit no one can know, and believe, and do what the Christian must know, and believe, and do for his soul's health and salvation. "Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." When we have the providence of God lighted up by the Word of God, and the Word of God illuminated by the Spirit of God, then, then indeed, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." I perceive what Thou wilt have me to do, and I find grace and strength sufficient.

You see, therefore, how big with meaning is the short and simple prayer, "Lead me, and guide me, for Thy name's sake. I would that every young disciple would take it at his birthday, and at confirmation, then they will find help and strength, and so they will live as they expect to die. How beautiful it is when the young have a trust in God. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his ways?" By "taking heed." How many of the young live without any regard to their God and their everlasting condition! Oh, my dear young friends, take it henceforth as your motto and rule—"Guide me, and lead me, for Thy name's sake." Take the Word of God as your companion; it will prove your best, your truest, your only one at the last; and Christ Jesus, when you lie down will be with you, and when you wake up will talk with you, and aid you in every difficulty, and perplexity, and distress. In all your commercial matters, in all your household matters, God is ever present. Some are anxious for to-morrow, though they should take

no anxious thought for it ; the morrow takes thought for the things of itself. What then are you to do in all your trials and difficulties and perplexities ? Look up ; don't look down. Trust in God, and not in man. Lean on the Father ; go as a child to Him—realise Him—be with Him—be near to Him, and say, “For Thy name's sake guide me, and lead me.” Let us try to live more to Him, and remember, in pleasure and in toil, in sickness and in health, in lying down and in rising up, in company and in solitude, if we trust in Him, He will be our stay. What are the boasted wisdom and judgment, and understanding of men ? what will they be in a little while, when you come to the dark river, and stand alone on the brink, without a counsellor or companion ? who will take you by the hand, and lead you as you tread the verge of the river, and as you enter the dark, dread valley of the shadow of death ? Those who love you best will be weeping in helpless, hopeless agony around you ; and as their voices whisper to you consolation as you depart, who will take you up then ? “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” Then, brethren, look to Him to guide you with His counsel, and afterward to receive you to glory.





II.

THE HIDDEN LEAVEN.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”—
MATT. xiii. 33.

THE expression “the kingdom of heaven” is used, especially by the Saviour, in two senses. It is used of the empire of the gospel in the world, its open and visible results; and it is used of the grace of the gospel in the heart of the individual believer. The one is external, and expands; and the other is internal, and there also expands and extends, but not visibly so much as invisibly: it is visible in its results, but it is invisible in its operations. “The kingdom of heaven” is used in the parable immediately preceding in the former sense. Christ there compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed—small in its beginnings, but large in its results. It is one of the smallest of seeds, but when it has sprung up it spreads into wide trees, as the mustard trees in the East do, so wide and umbrageous that the fowls of the air lodge beneath the branches. The other, and sister parable, is designed to represent the kingdom of God in its unseen aspect. It is compared to a woman taking leaven, and hiding it in three measures of meal, a mode of preparing for baking in the East, and still adopted in this country. The leaven thus hidden works, and gradually permeates the entire mass, until the whole is leavened and

prepared for baking. Here, then, we have for ourselves, individually and personally, a picture that is more interesting than as a mere outward representation, for to each one of us "the kingdom of God" is not the church at large—the visible church,—but the invisible work of God in our own souls. Man's destiny hereafter will not be determined by what branch of the visible church he belonged to, or by what theory or profession of faith he made, but by the condition and state of his own individual moral being before God. If he is holy, then indeed he will be happy for ever; but if a man is not born of God, it will matter but little that he belonged to a particular church, that will be to little purpose if he has never received the effectual grace of God. If he has never become a renewed man, in vain will he have made a profession of faith; but the more terrible will be his doom, because he has been an unprofitable servant. We invite you, therefore, brethren, to a personal searching, to an individual subject, when we ask you to contemplate the impressive, simple, and instructive hiding of the leaven described in the parable. May the Spirit of God accompany His truth, that each of us may have this blessed kingdom of heaven established within us, for Christ's sake.

The kingdom of heaven then, or the work of God in the soul, *is like leaven*. It at once occurs to us that leaven is something foreign to and different from the meal in which it is hidden; that it does not spring from or arise out of any fermentation in the meal; for, if left to itself, the meal would decay, and would never become leavened. Leaven has therefore to be introduced. It must be inserted, or, as the word here expresses it, "*hidden*." And this implies that "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation." Yet it comes, it is not there, it does not grow in a man, it does not come in the natural birth, it is not born "of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of

God ;" therefore, wherever there is the work of holiness in the soul of the sinner, it is "a new birth unto righteousness," he is "delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." This represents it as something extrinsic, something from without, something from above, something imparted and not created, not here by any innate effort, or wisdom, or prudence, or power of our own ; but, on the contrary, all is of grace. "Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." And one in whom that blessed kingdom had its full sway, said, "By grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God." How clearly this humbles the sinner, and leads him who would be saved to the foot of the cross, that he may obtain grace. There is no life in the soul, no fermentation, no working till there is somewhat of grace. The first effect of grace in the heart of man is to disturb him ; to awaken him out of his lethargy to a consciousness of the mighty work to be done and not yet accomplished, to a conviction that the time is short, that the emergency is terrible, that the result is infinite ; and therefore he is awakened and aroused. But the grace is "hidden" in a man's heart. "The kingdom of God," said Jesus, "cometh not with observation." It is not seen at the time when we have received the grace of God, but it will be manifest afterwards in its results. At first, a man seeks meditation in the retirement of the closet ; he loves to reflect and he shrinks from observation ; he dreads the notice of men, and is wounded in spirit ; and therefore he is like Peter, who, when he went out, sought seclusion and "wept bitterly." There is many a man in whom the Spirit

of God is at work, and he scarcely knows it himself. He does not know what has happened to him, and to others it is altogether a mystery and unaccountable. There is no grace until it is concealed in the heart—until it is, as it were, buried there, lodged there by the Spirit of God.

Then, it is clear, in the next place, that grace in the heart will be an abiding work—it will be energetic and *permanent*. The leaven hidden in the meal fermented and spread. If it had not done so it would have been of no avail, and all would have been in vain. Would the woman have hidden the leaven if she had thought that being there concealed it would not have put forth energy and fermentation in the mass? So it is with the grace of God in the heart of the sinner; it is an active work, it is fermenting; it does not leave a man alone in deadness or indifference or apathy, but it will always put forth a power and energy the man never had before. There are those who talk of dormant grace, of grace lying in the heart, as if it had no activity or virtue; of baptismal grace, as if a man could be possessed of grace, and for years and years go astray and live in all kinds of iniquity, and still not be without it. This is confounding the natural conscience and the mere strivings and ordinary drawings of the Spirit with the living and vital work of God in the heart. There is no such thing as dead grace; there is no such thing as inactive grace. In a dead tree, why does not the sap rise, why does it not put forth its blossoms and buds, why does it not bear fruit in due time? It cannot, for there is no life in it; it is dead, it is lacking all the evidences of life, and that is a proof that it does not live at all. There is no such thing as dormant life in a tree: and there is no such thing as dormant grace in the soul. Howsoever and wheresoever a man receives grace, whether in regeneration, at baptism, in approaching God's table, in the reading or the preaching of the word,

through the instrumentality of sickness or tribulation; whatever the time, or the date, or the circumstance, it will be active, and it will put forth energy in the soul. The very purpose and object of it is that it may leaven and produce a revolution, a rejuvenation, a transformation in the heart in which it is lodged. Therefore, brethren, we have no saving grace, unless it is working in our souls, and working mightily and effectually.

Next, it is clear that the result will be in those in whom it is hidden, that it will be *assimilated*, and that it will produce effects similar to itself. Though the leaven be a foreign infusion into the meal, yet the leaven acts upon the meal, and makes it partake of its flavour, and like the leaven in taste, and action, and result; so that it assimilates. And is it not so in regard to grace got into a man's heart? It is not to be *upon* him as a mere scion—tied to a tree, but not incorporated with the tree; but it is to be *in* him, as a graff inserted in the stock and incorporated with the stock, so that it is no longer the old graff, but it is producing genuine fruit; instead of the crab, the apple from the garden of Eden shall be the result. Even so the grace of God in the soul of man works *in* him. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." What before was altogether carnal, is now spiritual; before, the man was given up to blindness and the senses were dimmed—now, he is walking by faith in the Son of God; before, Christ was a name only—now, Christ is a possession, a theme of interest; before, the affections and desires were absorbed in the things that perish—now, they are directed to things spiritual and eternal; before, there was no communion with God—now, all is of God; before, the life to come was but a notion, a dream, put off and neglected—now, the great desire is so to live as to live eternally; man's great aim is to give an

account of his stewardship, and prepare to do it by serving his generation according to the will of God. Whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God, and "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," becomes his element and his delight. It is true that, as yet, the diffusion of the leaven is not complete; there is still the old man, the flesh wrestling and striving against the Spirit; but still "the flesh shall not have the dominion," for there is amongst it the leaven which is counteracting the natural corruption that would take place if it were not for the leaven. He is himself, yet not himself; he is another man, yet he seems the same man; he has the same faculties, affections, powers, energies, and natural tendencies, but all these are transmuted into a new aspect; he is "renewed in the spirit of his mind," and he has "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Like as a needle when it is magnetised turns towards the pole; so, when the heart of man is magnetised by the Spirit of God it tends heavenward, upward, Godward, Christward—there is a new tendency, a new bias. Therefore you see here is another test for trying whether you have the grace of God:—Is it assimilating you to God? If it is not, if there is no result in your heart, if it leaves you carnal, earthly, and sensual, lie not against the truth, for such "wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish."

But it is a comfort to think, in the next place, that the assimilating operation of this leaven is gradual and *progressive*. It is not all at once. It is what may be in existence some time before it is discoverable in its results. Its progress is slow, but certain. Our blessed Redeemer himself tells us that the kingdom of God is like unto the seed a man casts into a field; after a time it springs up, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear;"

and one of the wisest of men thus describes the progress of the kingdom of heaven in the soul : "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." St. Paul describes the work thus : "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." So it is a progressive work ; and, therefore, we may look up with courage, for though the grace is so small that it is but as a grain of mustard seed, and as a little leaven, it shall progress and advance. Justification is immediate and complete, but sanctification is progressive ; small often in its beginnings, but effectual in its progress. It is much to encourage those who are babes in grace to know that, if they watch on, and work on, and grow up in grace, they shall become young men ; and let the young man be but faithful and diligent, and he will at the last be "found of Him in peace." It is progressive.

And it is *pervasive*. The leaven leavens on until it pervades the whole mass. A man, if he has the grace of God, cannot be good in one week and bad in another. You often hear men say of another, "He is a humble man—he must be a good man ; after all, he has a good heart, and is himself his worst enemy." Men are ever ready to make thousands of apologies ; they call evil good and good evil, they put darkness for light and light for darkness. Woe unto them ! for such a vocabulary will not stand in the great day. The words of God, that cannot lie, are they alone that will decide a man's destiny hereafter. Therefore you may be assured of this, if grace is in the heart, it will extend to the whole man. Not perfectly ; there will still be an approach to the natural, but the new nature will be complete. A little child in its mother's lap, before it recognises the eye that dwells upon it, is still complete in all its measure,

though not in its fulness. It has all the parts and properties of the future man—all the faculties of the mind, all the affections, all the energies of the heart, all the proportions of body, all the symmetry of limbs, all the nerves, and the whole texture and structure of man in embryo, waiting to be gradually developed. And is it not so with the babe in Christ? There is true repentance, there is humility, there is faith, there is love of the Saviour; meekness is there, gentleness is there, long-suffering is there. Let no man deceive himself; he cannot be a good man and a proud man, he cannot be good in one point and not good in another; he cannot have a portion of his faculties and members and feelings good, they must *all* be good. And so it is with the leaven of grace; it is pervasive, and needs spreading over all a man's thoughts, and words, and deeds, ere he tends toward completeness. For, after all, this is the great proof that it is true leaven, that it is the grace from above, if you "yield yourself unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." A man then finds out that many things are wrong which he thought before were right, that he has been neglecting what he ought to be attending to. He does not try to get rid of his convictions because they may disturb him; but he sets to work to think what has been wrong, to supply what has been deficient, and to bring under subjection what has been in disorder and confusion. This is a beautiful evidence of the work of grace in the soul. And it permeates the whole man—it touches every point—it extends to all his fears, difficulties, and pursuits. A man then is not a saint on Sundays and a sinner on other days; he is not a saint in the temple of God, and a sinner in the counting-house and on the exchange; he is not one day amidst the company of the riotous and the scornful, and another day seeking the fellowship of the faithful. No;

whatever he does goes well with him, and he does all to the glory of God, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

And then, brethren, the crown of the whole is, that *the leaven shall ultimately pervade the whole mass*. Before it is complete the whole mass is assimilated, and prepared, and so the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven hid in meal. Yes, brethren, this is indeed the ground of our encouragement. He is faithful, "who also will do it;" and again, "God is faithful" who will "perform;" and again, it is said, God "worketh in you both to will and to do;" and, if *He* works in you, can the work fail? What does He say again? He gives His sheep—those that are under the influence and teaching of His grace—"eternal life;" and, therefore, He will at the last perfect His work, the leaven shall at last pervade the whole mass, and man shall awake up after the image of the Lord, for grace is tending to glory, and glory is complete; there is no spot, no imperfection, no shade, but all is perfect and complete. And we know our labour "is not in vain in the Lord," for "He which hath begun a good work will perform it" to the end. He is not one that leaves His blessed work unaccomplished; for He says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." If, sometimes, it be scant and feeble within us, that blessed spark of heavenly fire tends upwards like the sparks of earthly fire, and shall at last blaze forth in the glorious light of immortality, and not one imperfection shall be found. Remember, then, that there must be grace in the heart, or all advantages and privileges cannot profit us; for in vain is a man pure, in vain is he baptized, in vain is he a regular attendant at

worship, in vain is he a member of a church, in vain is he attending the ordinances of religion, in vain is he making a fair show as a Christian, if he have not the grace of God in his heart, and if he does not realise that which alone will last till all shadows pass away, that which alone will be with him when he passes into the presence of his God. There will be no mistake then ; therefore see to it that you desire God, search yourselves, know yourselves, prove yourselves, and see the ground of your hearts. Do not forget that with grace there will be life and energy. "The kingdom of God" is not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Until a man is aroused, until he is awakened, until he is turned and led to lay hold on eternal life, he is not a partaker of saving grace. If a man have it, he will feel its effects in his own heart and life. If, then, we have this grace, we may thank God and take courage, and go on in the name of the Lord, for Omnipotence cannot fail. And we must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us." If it depended on our own strength, we might abandon it in despair ; but He who hath said, shall He not make it good ? "Is anything too hard for the Lord ?" "Who art thou, O great mountain ? before Zerubabel thou shalt become a plain : and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."





III.

TRUE HEROISM: COUNTING THE COST.

“Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?”—St.

LUKE xiv. 28.

THE cunning impostor when he wishes to delude his dupes, and to lead them to follow him in blindness, takes care to throw into the background, or to exclude altogether from the picture, everything that would be fitted to scare them or revolt them, whatever would expose them to danger, or lead them to self-denial; meantime he contrives to exaggerate all that is fair and flattering. He does this on purpose, because he lies in wait to delude. How unlike the false teacher was that great Teacher who came from heaven to earth, seeking to save the lost. A mighty multitude beheld Him, hung upon His lips, and witnessed His miracles. It was so when He uttered the words before us. So far was He from wishing to *compel* men to follow Him, or to delude them to be His disciples, that He forewarned them of what they would have to encounter. He would have no impressed soldiers, but all volunteers and willing soldiers of His Cross. He did not, therefore, throw a veil round that which, in its very nature, was fitted to scare and intimidate them, but He the rather bid them to sit down, count the cost, and of their own will decide deliberately once and for ever. The parable before us was spoken to a mighty multitude that followed Christ. He turned to them, and said, If any man come to me, and doth

not bear his cross, and come after me, he cannot be my disciple ; and, therefore, He would have them to weigh well before they cast in their lot with His little flock—before they assumed the standard of His Cross—before they put on the uniform of His profession.

*The cost of a genuine Christian profession:—the need that we calculate the cost:—the reasons why, notwithstanding the cost, we should decide at once for Christ,—*these truths naturally spring out of the instructive parable before us, and we shall deal with them for your edification and instruction. God grant the presence and power of His Spirit, that you may weigh well, and decide deliberately for Christ.

*The cost of a Christian profession, if it be genuine and true.—*Alas ! to be called Christian, to have been baptized, to have the Christian name, to pass muster with the world as a Christian, to pass along so as not to give any great cause for scandal and offence, is a light and little thing ; and as John Bunyan well paints in his admirable portraiture of the false as well as the true professor ; “There are many By-ends, who like to go with religion when religion goes in silver slippers, who love to walk with him in the street, if the sun shines, and the people applaud him, but such By-ends will not pass muster in the great day.” They may be esteemed members of the visible Church, but the question is, “Will they stand the test in the great day, when the Lord comes to reckon with the servants ? Will they be found among the faithful or the faithless ? Will they be on the right hand or on the left hand ? If, indeed, we understand the Christian profession as Jesus portrays it, we cannot suppose it is a thing that does not require to be weighed well. There *is* a cost, there *is* a price to be paid, there *is* a sacrifice to be counted upon, there *are* difficulties and dangers to be looked forward to, there *is* much to be foregone that men naturally like, there *is* much to be undergone that men naturally dis-

like, there *is* much to be struggled against contrary to the current of our nature, there *is* much to be borne up against that will be hard to bear, and on these things we are to decide. As our Catechism justly and wisely expresses it, the soldier of the cross has much to “renounce.” If any man engages in earthly warfare he engages himself to leave his country, his home, his father, his mother, his sisters, and his brothers, that he may please him who has engaged him for the war ; and if it be so in earthly warfare, how much more must it be so in the heavenly conflict ? If a man must thus deny himself in order to be a soldier of his country, how much more must he deny himself to be a soldier under the Captain of his salvation. He requires us to renounce his enemies, who are our foes, let us not forget, though we naturally regard them as our friends. Our sympathies are with them, and our desires and tastes lead us captive after them. Take the first,—the world, and its pomps and vanities. Are not these naturally tasteful and pleasant to you ? Do you not naturally take delight in them ? Are they not as natural to you as the sunshine and the air are to the insect and the butterfly ? You like them, you take pleasure in them, you have a taste towards them ; and yet, as you had it in the lesson of the evening, “Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” Can a man, then, be a friend of Christ, and not renounce the world ? His heart must not be there ; he must not walk according to its course ; he must not take delight in its lusts, and its vanities, and its pomps, and its pleasures ; he must not be vain, as its children are ; he must not be ambitious, as its children are ; he must not be covetous, as its children are ; he must not be light and frivolous, as its children are. He must walk after a different rule,—he must have his treasure and his hope, in a different place ;—he must pass alone, as it were, through the world ; he must be more as a lodger

than as a dweller ; he must be as a stranger and pilgrim, rather than as a friend and citizen of the earth ; he must look more onward, and upward, and homeward ; he must keep his garments that they fall not, lest they be defiled ; he must gird up the loins of his mind ; he must watch and be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto him at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is not a pleasant thing to have to walk differently from the multitude around us ; it is pleasanter to be in the broad way and amid the throng, than to get into the narrow way amid the comparatively few and strangers, and to be often reproached and reviled ; but a man must not be ashamed of the pilgrim's garb or the pilgrim's staff ; he must not climb over the fences, though he find the road somewhat narrow, and thorns and briars are around it. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, to count the cost of renouncing the world.

And still more severely must he follow another renunciation, which, after all, is the core and centre of the whole ; he must renounce the flesh. Again and again, our Lord tells us, if we would follow Him, we must deny ourselves ; and that is the greatest denial of all, for a man to take up arms against his own nature ; to fight with his own tempers ; to grapple with his own lusts ; to watch his own desires, and to deny them when they lead him wrong, and to crush them ; or, as it is so emphatically said, "to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts"—to mortify your own members, your evil desires, and your corrupt principles. If any man supposes that this costs no trouble or sacrifice, he will deceive himself. Yet in doing battle with himself, the struggle will be most within. Keep the citadel, and the city is safe ; guard against foes within, and you will have comparatively but little danger to fear from the foes without ; it is when there is a conspiracy in the citadel that most is to be feared.

Then, too, remember, that you must also renounce the

wicked one ; and though there are many who shrink from the thought or idea of a prince of darkness, how many serve him, and do his will—though they think they do not—and act according to “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” When a man gives way to pride, and passion, and envy, and revenge, and jealousy, and resentment, and self-inflation, and dissatisfaction with God, and discontent, and murmurings, and indulges himself in his own revengeful and angry feelings, whom does he serve? to whom is it he is lending himself to be the slave? Certainly to Satan. It is a very difficult thing for a man to become the heavenly servant of the Lord Jesus, who came “that He might destroy the works of the devil ;” it is a difficult thing to be found fighting manfully under Christ’s banner against the evil inclinations, and thoughts, and tempers, and appetites, and desires, with which Satan inflames us, and by which he leads the wicked captive at his will ; yet we must be ready to say, in the beautiful language of the prayer of the prophet of old, “O Lord our God, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us: but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name.” “No man can serve two masters ;” no man can unite the service of Satan with the service of Christ. A man must make his election ; will you have Jesus to be your Redeemer? will you give your whole heart to him? “Whose I am, and whom I serve ;” there is a beautiful description of a genuine Christian profession.

But we must not glance only at what a man must *forego*, but at what he must *undergo* ; and here is the part of the cost that many shrink from. For instance, a young man is entangled in the midst of worldly connexions, and he begins to look more serious, and to go to church, and to read his Bible regularly, and to find out that he is disinclined to go to the theatre, and to scenes of rioting and revelling, and to

join the multitude to do evil. He knows what will follow, but the cross must be taken up. He will be laughed at by the silly and ungodly ; he will be sneered at and scorned by the proud and self-indulgent ; and this is not agreeable to many, least of all to young men ; but, as I warned them before, "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Not to consent will be a sore cost, but it must be done. A man must not care how his companions frown, if his Master smiles ; he must not care if they style him fool, fanatic, Methodist, Puritan, if the Lord say to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." He must not be ashamed to confess his Master, and then his Master will not be ashamed to confess him before the angels of God. And, therefore, brethren, there *is* a cost ; a man *must* undergo shame and the cross ; it will not do to dismiss it, to muzzle it, to step over it even in order to escape it, for, as the Master tells us, "If any man will come after me, he must bear his cross" daily and hourly.

And there is the cross *without*, as well as the cross *within*. He is to mortify his own external desires and passions, and to bear reproach and ridicule. Such is the folly and infatuation of our nature, that we are afraid of the smiles and frowns of men. There are men who will face the cannon's mouth, who dare not face the ridicule and laughter of the fool. A man *must* count the cost ; he must not expect to get the crown and escape the cross ; but he must take up the one, that he may reach the other. And then, too, there is more to be undergone. A man must expect even loss, and sometimes sacrifice of all his worldly prospects, to secure his heavenly inheritance. There will come occasions and opportunities when it will be put before him, "Will you have success and wealth in this world, or run all risk of losing wealth and friends, even of incurring ruin, rather than make shipwreck of your eternal hope?" Yes ;

the right hand must be cut off, and the right eye must be plucked out, if a man will not lose his soul. These are not days of direct persecution : through the good hand of God upon us, the faggot no longer threatens us, the block and fetters are no longer ready to scare us, though they may come upon us again in our day—at least in the days of the younger amongst us ; for prophecy seems to indicate that in the latter days there will be a mighty mustering, a rallying of the powers of evil, and that men will be allowed to persecute again. Ay, the old persecuting spirit still burns in the breasts of bigots ; it still slumbers in the heart of the inquisitor, and persecution lacks but the power to put forth again its dark and hideous snakes, not to hiss alone, but to poison. Remember, we must have the martyr's spirit, though we may not have the martyr's doom ; and that spirit is simply this,—anything rather than deny my God, and barter my soul. “I count all things but dung, that I may win Christ.” Can a man do less to be Christ's true disciple ? If it came to the alternative, what would a man desire ? If he did not through grace say, “Take all, but leave me Christ,” rather than “Give me all, and take Christ,” he would not be Christ's true disciple—his profession would be wanting. I do not mean to say a man will be prepared for this beforehand. He has it not in himself ; but if a man's heart is right with God, when the trial comes, he will have strength to bear it ; for He who puts the gold into the furnace will prevent it being consumed, save what is dross. Hence, a young man looks forward even to leaving his family and his circle of friends, if they stand in his way ; for Christ has told us that “a man's foes shall be they of his own household ;” for “think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace but a sword.” Thenceforth the father should be against the son, and the son against the father ; the daughter against the mother,

and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. If you look back upon the history of the Christian church, and especially on its members, you will see a sad illustration of this ; and still in one family you see the ground of discord is, when the child is held to be too faithful to God, or when the father seeks a child's peace and benefit, so that he is by many regarded as stern and harsh, because he would restrain his children from ruining themselves. There *is* a cost—a heavy cost—a large cost ; and we would not dismiss, or alleviate, or conceal it. And, let me add, that a man has need to go and count the cost, or he does not become in good earnest and honestly a disciple of Jesus. If the Master set it before him, he has no right to pass it over, or deduct from it, or try to suppose that it is exaggerated. Christ speaks the naked truth ; He means what He says, and we must take Him at His word ; and, therefore, for this very reason, that Christ has set it before all His soldiers, we are bound to receive it. The soldier, when he enlists, has his regulations—the regulations of the army ; and his oath tells him that complete obedience and submission is required from him. The “Captain of our salvation” has put instructions into our hands ; and if the earthly soldier is bound to obey his instructions, how much more is the Christian warrior bound to study his ? And let it not be forgotten that this is essential, or a man deceives himself ; and, by-and-bye, he will find himself struggling against the tide, and his little bark will be floating up the current, because he is not founded on truth, and is not grounded on what Christ has told him. Therefore it is, that men become offended. They “receive the word with joy” for a time, but they do not continue. How often have you seen this ? How many times have promising young persons got cold, and discouraged, and disheartened, and looked back, having “put their hands to the plough !” I often fear lest

we too little lay before them that which they must encounter; lest we do not sufficiently forewarn them that it will be no "strange thing" that will come upon them when they are called upon to endure persecution and reproach. How often has reproach been brought upon Christ's people, because men have taken up the profession of Christians carelessly, as the result of impulse, at the bidding of fancy, rather than the constraining Spirit of God. Then they have disgraced their profession, and have fallen away, and have given occasion to the scorner to mock, and to the weak to stumble, and to the blasphemer to reproach; "but woe unto him through whom the offences come."

If a man counts the cost, he counts also the help and succour he shall find; for he knows his weakness, and he learns his strength; and if he finds himself encompassed with danger, he will not rush into the temptation, but he will nestle beneath the Almighty wings, and shelter beneath the ark of safety. It is clear that God gave counsel as wise as it is gracious when He bid us, ere we built for eternity, to count the cost. When a man begins to build a house on a rock, he should sit down to count the cost, for "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." Yes, brethren, though He will have you count the cost, if you sum up the gains on the one hand, and the costs on the other, and then deduct the losses from the gains, the balance sheet will be utterly and infinitely on the side of the gains; for after all, when you compare the two,—what a man has to give up, and what he gains,—and make a fair computation, what is the result? You, who are engaged in business, know how to deduct the losses from the gains; and when you find the gains immeasurably outdo the losses, you are satisfied and content. You do not sit down and brood over the losses, but you exult in the gains. Let us then just reckon up *our* gains, and see whether they do not outdo the losses. In the

first place, if a man count the cost of taking up the standard, and enlisting in the army of Christ, he has to obey the simple claims of Christ as one in whom there is power and authority. It is no usurper who bids you follow him, it is no deceiver who bids you trust him. Who has a right to us but Christ? who endowed us with all we have? who purchased us and redeemed us with His own precious blood? "Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." "If any man serve me, let him follow me." What right have you to invite Him to show cause—to say, "Give me a reason, satisfy my judgment, convince my reason?" You cannot say so to Christ. Surely, if ever there were claims to constraint, they are *His*; if ever there was an authority we ought to obey, it is *His* authority, whose voice called all things into being, who will decide the doom and destiny of all, whom to serve is "perfect freedom," whom to love is heaven begun, and whom to please is the soul of all happiness. Is it hard or unreasonable to say, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me?" Then, too, brethren, is not the gain far greater than the loss, when we remember the provision He has made for His soldiers and servants in all their difficulties, and in all their struggles, in all they have to bear and undergo? Is He not ever at hand to help us? is not the Captain in front of His soldiers? is He not in the front of the pathway with His own blessed footsteps? has He not borne a cross infinitely heavier than we have to bear? has He not drunk a cup, far, far bitterer than we have to taste? "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub," shall *we* complain? if they obeyed not Christ, but contemned Him, shall *we* complain that they contemn us? Surely it is but a small thing that the servant has to bear in some small measure the reproaches heaped upon the Master,

that he has to taste some of the bitter cup his Lord has drunk to the dregs for him ; surely a man should rather glory in his cross. “ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.”

And then, brethren, let us not forget that if the service of Christ has its sorrows, it has its joys ; if it has its self-denials, it has its self-indulgencies ; if here there are thorns and briars, the world above has everlasting flowers, and heavenly violets, and sweet-smelling lilies, that shed a fragrance around all and above all ; and though the way may be narrow, it is a straight one ; it has no pitfalls, no traps, no bitter fears, no dark forebodings, no haunted spirits, but it has the “ promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” It saves a man from a thousand snares, it shields him from a thousand dark remorsees, it guards him from a thousand fearful misgivings, and enables him to look God and man in the face. Can the world, or the service of the world, do *that*? Look at the shame ! look at the sorrow ! look at the misery ! look at the diseases ! look at the shipwrecks ! look at the ravaged families ! look at the desolations and devastations ! look at the dark, dark agonies ! look at the dreadful deaths ! look at the horrible suicides ! look at the terrific pangs of remorse that haunt and harass the children of the world ! These things have little or no power over the children of God, who are protected under the shadow of His wing ; they tread a pathway where no wolves or beasts of prey raven, or hissing serpents sting.

Then, to sum up all, if we cast into the balance of gains “ life everlasting,” surely that must make the scale touch the ground, and the opposite scale strike the beam. “ What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?” Let there be sorrows, let there be sacrifices, let

there be reproaches, let there be crosses, we shall find, when all are added up and computed, and the balance sheet is prepared, that the balance is in favour of the gains. "I reckon," said one who had large experience of the world's trials, "that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Can language go further? And that is not the language of a fanatic, or a fool, but of the Spirit of God, teaching us through one whom he had taught with divine wisdom, that overcoming is heroism: The heroism of the cross—that is true heroism. Look at the parable, read it over, ponder it, especially you who are looking forward to renew your Christian covenant, and to ratify your engagements to the "Captain of your salvation." Count the cost, we invite you. We invite you to learn, we invite you to understand, and not to come unprepared or unintelligent. We do not wish you to plunge into a precipitate profession with no intention of keeping it, with no intention of undergoing what it requires. Count the cost then deliberately, and decide. Do not leave out the gains while you count the losses, but take it as it is. But do not forget that the gains are indeed large and infinite, and that the losses are transient and small—that they are losses only because we are lost by nature, and that if we were right they would be our joy and our gain. Let us not forget, also, if we have counted the cost, and found what we have to undergo, we must not trust in our own strength, it must be the strength of Christ "made perfect in weakness;" it must not only be conviction, but it must be through the Spirit of God. No marvel that our church has taught her minister, when he lays his hand upon our heads to pray, that we may "daily increase in God's Holy Spirit more and more." Oh, there is our hope, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of

God dwelling in us and working in us the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

And, finally, let us not forget this ; we must not count upon a sinless perfection, of being ever without a cross. While we are in this state, we must ever expect the conflict. An old man may not have love of pleasure, or the excitements and follies and entanglements of the young, but the old man has still temptations, in losses, in worldly cares, in ambition, in anxiety about his family—he has a thousand struggles and losses ; so that we must ever be putting our armour on, till we can put it off when the battle is won, and the home of rest is reached. It is he that “endures to the end” that will be the accepted soldier ; and he, having counted the cost, will hear, when he comes into the presence of the Lord, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”





IV.

GOD OVER ALL.

With whom we have to do."—HEBREWS iv. part of 13.

ST. PAUL tells us, if we are believers we are saved by the things we believe, if we keep them in memory. It is not so much what a man knows, as what a man remembers, and yet not so much what a man remembers, as what a man realises, that tells on his inner and outward character, that shapes and moulds and makes a man in the sight of God. There are many people who have very defective memories, and are exceedingly apt to forget the things they have learned. It seems specially important to such, that they should have deeply lodged in their hearts, and continually present in their minds, certain short sentences, big with unspeakable import, that condense as it were the very essence of Christ's gospel into a single, short, simple, plain, obvious maxim, that a man may carry with him everywhere, and have present to him always, if only he is alive to it, and seeks it as he ought. The Bible is rich with such brief, compendious sentences and sentiments, as carry with them demonstration that they are from God. One of these sentences is before us—a portion of a sentence, and yet a portion so full, so grand, so solemn, and so deeply important to us all, that it may well demand and have our earnest attention for a brief period of Christian instruction. The apostle is awakening and arousing the slumbering Christians to be on the alert, to be alive to the high work of their salvation,

and he reminds them that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

We have to do with God: that is the one point before us. May He, by His Spirit, solemnize us and make us realise and feel that we have specially to do with Him in His courts, and in hearkening to the voice of His Word.

We have to do with God in so many relationships, and so many points, that we must single out the most prominent.

We have to do with God, fundamentally and pre-eminently, as our *Creator*. Whence came we? How are we? What are we? Who made us? "He made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." The man that does not believe he was made by God, is an atheist; but there is no such a being to be found on this earth. A man may brutalise himself, he may debase himself till he has lost all sense of God; but a man cannot drive himself to the monstrous and horrible lie that there is no God. How did he make himself? who made him? The poor, pitiful wretched fable that men have trumped up, in order to account for the existence of man without a Creator, only proves them to be arrant fools, or utter idiots. To talk of such creatures being the result of a mere "conflux of atoms," springing up by gradual development from the monkey to man, only proves the man to be the monkey that dreams of such poor, miserable, brutalising fancies. Whence came we,—not simply this frame of ours, so wondrously wrought a piece of mechanism, so exquisite that the skill of man falls into insignificance before it, but the wondrous spirit that inhabits it, the reasoning mind with all its surprising faculties and powers, the moral heart with all its marvellous affections, all its desires, all its hopes, all its fears, a little world within us? No man can for a moment, in his sober senses, fancy this is the result of chance or of mere materialism. A man may as well deny his existence altogether—

and far better. Then, brethren, can any man come to any other conclusion than that that simple history of the creation of man by God tells us plainly how these bodies of ours were fashioned, by His taking of the dust of the ground, when a breath from the inspiration of the Almighty put into him vigour, and man came forth a reasoning, intelligent, immortal, mortal spirit? If so, then the whole of the human race springing from that one parent are the same. "All souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son." How this can be is a mystery; who can fathom, who can explain, who can unfold it? What then? The effect is perfectly the same, whether we disbelieve it or believe it, whether we can account for it or not, whether it is a mystery or plain. Mystery! why, man is surrounded and enveloped in mystery, without and within. Everything is mystery to poor short-sighted man. What can he do but repose in the simple truth of God, and take the Divine statements as they stand? That is his only wisdom, that is his only stay, that is his only solid repose and support, and he is the victim of his own folly if he does not anchor upon the immutable truth of God.

Now, if God made us, and not we ourselves, if the faculties of our mind, if the energies of our heart, if the wondrous proportions of our body, are all from Him, then can we ever be separate from God? can we ever cease to have that relationship to Him that the creature has to the Creator, the relationship that a child has to a parent? A parent has a claim upon a child as long as it lives. The child can never say, "I have no connexion with my father, I owe him nothing, he has no authority over me." And if this is true of the earthly father, how must it be true of the mighty God? What says God? "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" We have to

do, then, with a God of love as our Creator. "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" Shall any man dare to call in question the right of God to challenge our reverence, our submission, our obedience, the complete and absolute assignation of ourselves to Him? Whether we will or not, the claim is there irrefragable, indefeasible, eternal, for ever and ever; therefore, we shall have to do with God as our Creator, whether we will or not.

Then, brethren, we advance a further link in the chain. We have to do with God as our *Preserver*, no less than as our Creator. Strange, that men live on year after year, and go up and down, sleeping and waking, toiling and resting, mourning and rejoicing, and yet they can forget how it is that they live, and continue in life; how it is that reason still holds its seat; how it is that the heart still throbs, issuing forth the crimson stream of life; how it is that the wondrous process of digestion goes on, assisting the functions of the body; how it is that they have power of reason and reflection continued; how it is that all does not go into dislocation and chaos, and men become drivelling idiots; how it is that the harp strings are kept in tune; how it is they are not continually tormented with anguish, distemper, and distress:—can any man account for this? If we did not make ourselves, if we did not string the harp, we cannot keep it attuned; if we did not form the mechanism, we cannot keep it from decay and dissolution. There is no independent life but in the one Fountain of all life, and all other life is a life of dependence—a dependence of the creature on the Creator, of the thing made upon the Maker, of the thing living on Him that gave it life. Our blessed Redeemer claims this power for Himself as the Son of God; He is in the Father, He has "life in Himself," and whom He wills

He quickens. As there is no man, no angel, no archangel, that can make a little insect, a little mite, a little emmet, a little midge, live or give it life ; so no being in the universe can continue the least thing that lives in life ; when it dies he cannot make it live, nor can he sustain it in life when it lives. Life, that mysterious thing, is shrouded round with inaccessibility to man ; he cannot give it, he cannot even discover, or tell what it is ; he cannot detect it. If he examines it, he can tell us of its properties, of the means of its support, and of its extension ; but he cannot tell us what it is, or how it is, and much less can man continue that mysterious property, life. We say of a thing it is dead, what has happened ? We say of a thing it lives, what is the difference ? We see, and sometimes we describe the process by outward symptoms, but we cannot tell in the slightest degree the source of the hidden mystery ; and so, brethren, it is said He “holdeth our soul in life,” and the apostle Paul describes it with the minutest accuracy, when he addresses the poor heathen : “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” Could anything go beyond that ? could anything be more minute than that ? could anything be more specific than that ? “*Live,*” “*move,*” “*have our being.*” Then, brethren, does not this create absolute dependency, whether men admit it or deny it ; whether they boast themselves in their own delusions and presumption, or humble themselves at the footstool of the mighty Creator, and say, “Thou preservest me, thou holdest my soul in life, thou keepest me in reason, thou keepest me in the exercise of every power and affection and faculty ; I am thine !” And if men are so foolish as to forget all this, and to live and act totally regardless of Him in whom they “live, and move, and have their being,” does it alter the reality ? We have to do with Him as our Creator ; we *must* have to do with Him in sickness and health, in peril and in safety, in life and in death,

in madness and in reason, in the lunatic asylum or the house of prayer ; we *must* have to do with him as our Creator. " Sir," said a poor maniac, that had escaped from bedlam, and was passing along the streets of London, to a gentleman he met at the angle of one of the streets, " Did you ever thank God for reason ?" The man stared, and said, " I cannot say that I ever did." " Then do so now, for I have lost mine !" said the poor man. And well I remember, when attending the death-bed of one who died of that most fearful disease, hydrophobia, as, in the agony of the spasms of disease, she grasped my hand until it ached, I repeated to her many of those beautiful prayers of ours, in one of which you have, or ought to have been joining, the thanksgiving, " We bless thee for our creation, preservation ;" and she said, with a shriek, " Oh, preservation, preservation, how we forget it ; look at me, and let none who know it ever forget it again !" Yes, preservation.

Then, brethren, we rise a further link in the chain. We have to do with Him, not only as our Creator and Preserver, but as our bounteous *Benefactor*, our gracious Attender, and the Fatherly Provider of all we have. Every man has little or much, whether he has gained it by the hand of industry, or inherited it from his forefathers. Whether a man is racked with pain all his life, or disordered, as some are, from their mother's womb ; whether he is blessed with health and a cheerful mind, or if he has anything that relieves him in this vale of tears, any flower that blooms in the desert, any star that brightens the dark sky of our fallen lot ; is it not all from God ? " He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good." All gifts are from Him ; and though men brutalise themselves with drink, and glut their vile lusts and appetites and passions, all are from God, though thus abused. It is a terrible thought that men have to do with God in all that they have, and abuse, and prostrate to

their own destruction ; it is all from God, and they cannot say in one thing they have, that it is not from Him. How this should make us reconciled, however He may deprive us, however He may strip us ; how we should be grateful for anything we have, for anything short of hell is the gift of His grace, to us who are deserving of hell ; and therefore, brethren, we ought to say, oh ! how often, “ Bless the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits : who forgiveth all thine iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies ;” who fills thy cup with consolation, and thy table with plenty. Oh ! how thoughtless and forgetful we seem to the Author of all our gifts ; and yet He has not left Himself without witness, in that He sends us fruitful seasons, and feeds us with food, and gladdens us with happiness in our sicknesses and recoveries, in our hours of domestic comforts, yea, and we might say, of our domestic afflictions too, so that we shall be able to say with him, who, looking around at the wreck of his magnificent fortune, said, “ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

We have a still further link in the chain that binds us to the Eternal. We have to do with God as our *Ruler and Governor*. Is any man so blind, is any man so infatuated, that he supposes this marvellous world, and all those countless worlds that fill the boundless space around us ;—does any one suppose that the world of mind, as well as the world of matter, that amid all the marvellous revolutions order is maintained amid the boundless empires ;—is any man, I say, so ignorant as to suppose any other than that, as these things did not make themselves, so they cannot govern themselves ? Does any man suppose, that because we talk of laws there is no lawgiver ? What is law, without the

power of enforcing it? What is government, without a governor? Without the Divine and mighty Ruler of all, what would take place? Universal anarchy, chaos, and desolation. "He calleth the stars all by their names," all the worlds to Him are less than the grains of dust are to us. Such is the boundless Omnipresence and Omniscience of Him, to whose eyes all things are naked, that all things obey His command; every mighty planet that rolls in its orbit, the sun and its systems, all are maintained and kept in order by Him. And, not only so, but more mysterious, more marvellous still, He is "King of kings, and Lord of lords;" He rules and governs the world, the mind of the world, the social politics of the world, He rules and governs all. Just at this juncture*—when we are in suspense, in fearful suspense, whether it is to be peace or war; whether Europe is to be a theatre of blood, or the olive-branch of peace is still to wave over it; when no one knows where existing difficulties will end; when no one knows how soon the fearful ravages may come prophecy foretells, as the punishment of unfaithfulness to God, and forgetting the lessons set before us, and setting at nought His commands, it enforces itself upon us that it is all with God. Men say, "No, it is with councils and rulers." Are not *they* with God? Oh, the marvel and the mystery of the Eternal One, that He can allow men to act according to their own impulses, and their own judgments, and their own devices, and sometimes after their own lusts and passions, and yet, while he leaves it so free that men are not tools, He controls them so completely that men are only instruments, and out of our inclinations He effectuates His own purposes. The angels and the archangels around His throne hearken to the voice of His word, and obey His commandments. This is a great mystery; but, as I said, the man that will

* June 26, 1864.

not believe it because it is mysterious, will believe nothing ; he will not believe that he lives, he will not believe that he has got a soul. And so it is, “the Lord reigneth,” “clouds and darkness are round about Him,” “He ruleth the raging of the sea,” and the madness of the people : all things obey Him in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth ; if anything, then everything. Then, brethren, whether we believe it or disbelieve it, whether we set it at nought or regard it, whether we like it or not, we have to do with God as our Ruler and Governor. Will any one say that God has not a right to claim to be Governor ?

Ah ! we have to do with Him as our *Lawgiver*, as well as our Ruler and Governor. He has given a law ; and all things—the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars—have laws ; summer and winter, autumn and spring, have all their laws and their appointed times,—the clouds have their laws, and the light above—everything has its laws ; and do you suppose the moral world hath no law, that the great God hath left the mind and spirit without anything to control or guide it ? I tell you no. In man, at the first, there was a perfect law engraven on the tablet of his heart, and it is there still ; and though shattered is the tablet, and blotted is the writing, man knows far more than he fancies ; he knows more what he ought to do, and what he ought not to do, than he will admit ; he has a conscience within him, and this is from God. And then we Christians—professing Christians—we have the law of God written again, republished by the Divine Registrar ; the law so plain and so simple that any man that has a heart can understand it, and so beautiful, and bountiful, and benevolent, and perfect, that no man with any right moral sense can find fault with it or deny it. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” And “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang

all the law and the prophets." They are all condensed into these two sentences. This is the universal moral law of God for all intelligent, responsible beings in heaven above and in the earth beneath. It is diversified according to circumstances, but the whole is based upon this principle—love to God and love to man.

And then, brethren, we have yet further to do with this great God as our *Judge*. Men cannot help having to do with Him as their Ruler, unconsciously, unbelievably it may be, and in spite of themselves, and in defiance of their resolution against God; but what will a man do in the end? What will be the issue of that war? A man may refuse to have to do with God in obedience and submission to His will; he may set it at nought and forget it; he may lose all sense of it, by imbruting his moral being and becoming scared as with a hot iron, but he *cannot* refuse to have to do with his Judge. And judgment is not all in a future world—it begins here; the conscience of a man passes a kind of judgment upon him as long as he reads it, until he blots it out, or drowns it in mirth, in unbelief, in crime, in debauchery, in drunkenness, and so seals it. Not only so, judgment has begun in this world in present punishment, often in present comfort, and joy, and peace. And judgment has begun at the house of God. We see frequently how God strikes down the wicked, and defeats the proud; and there is far more of judgment going on in the world than thoughtless people perceive. If a man watches the working of things, he will see judgment, and will prepare to hear the great Judge pronounce the sentence. "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, He is a God that judgeth in the earth."

And, brethren, we rise still higher in the chain and in relationship to God, whether we regard it or deny it, and I shall refer to it before I touch upon one or two points in which there is a choice on God's part. There is one other

relationship that belongs to us all, whether we regard it or not. We have all of us to do with God as a *Saviour*—"a just God and a Saviour." I believe in the beautiful summary of our Creed, and in the scriptural voice of our Church, "1st, I learn to believe in God the Father, who made me, and all the world; 2dly, In God the Son, who hath redeemed me, and all mankind; 3dly, In God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God." I believe, therefore, that God laid on His own Son "the iniquity of us all." He did not become simply the Son of man, but the Son of *men*—the Son of mankind. He did not take the nature of one race, or of one people, or of one colour, or of one clime; but He took upon Him the seed of Abraham: He took upon Him our nature, and became the Son of man, so that none can claim Him exclusively, and say, "He did not die for you;" nor can any one say, "He died for me alone." He is the Saviour of all men, and especially of them that belong "to the household of faith." And, therefore, brethren, you have to do,—you who are professed Christians, who are baptized into the name of Christ, you that have the gospel, you that hear the joyful sound, you that differ from the poor blind heathen and the wretched outcast idolaters—you have to do especially with God as your Saviour, and "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!" And, surely, if that is true, how shall we perish if we embrace it? If a man rejects it, he must take the consequence. Oh! brethren, you *can* have privileges, and you *must* have responsibilities. If any of you perish, you perish not as heathen, but as professed and baptized Christians, with the sign of the cross upon your brow, with the water of baptism on your face, and how this will turn into a source of remorse, and "the worm that never dies," if you perish with the name of Christian, with the cross of Christ upon your brow! Remember it, and while you thank God for your unspeakable privileges, "rejoice

with trembling." See to it, "for to whom much is given, of him shall be much required."

Brethren, we rise a step further still. We have to do with God; or, at least, we may have to do with Him—we have if we are wise, we have if we are saved—as *our reconciled Father*, "the Lord our Righteousness," in whom we are chosen, in whom we are sealed, in whom we are at peace with God. Oh! to have to do with God in peace, and reconciliation, and adoption; to have to do with God, not because we must, but because we would be "made willing in the day of His power," to have His love constraining us so that we yield ourselves to Him as "those that are alive from the dead, and our poor members as instruments of righteousness unto God." We have to do with Him, "groaning within ourselves, and waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies;" and we are able to testify that it is through His grace that He has made us His children. Thou art "the thing that I long for," O God; Thou hast given me my portion for ever. Oh to have to do with God in loving confidence and humble trust, to have to do with Him in our mourning and our feasting, is our happiness, and our safety, and our wisdom. He is our safety amid all the changes and chances of this mortal life; in all our dangers without, and our fears within; in all these things we have to do with Him, and we should say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Go where I will, pass through what I may, give up what I must, enjoy what He may please to give me, still Thou, the great Ruler of all, Thou God art Thyself of all gifts the best. Without Thee we are poor, give what Thou wilt; with Thee we are rich, take what Thou wilt. This is happiness. Oh! then, in what a new aspect we see the tie that binds us and was invisible. Every gift we enjoy we do enjoy, because we can say, "My Father

made them all, my Redeemer hath purchased them all for me."

Then how sweet to have to do with Him as our *Sanctifier*—our portion for ever; our Sanctifier, restoring us from the ruins of our fallen race, and raising us again to be a temple meet for His own habitation; beautifying us with grace, that shines in the Adam here, and that will shine more brightly in the second Adam. We have to do with Him in anticipation that we may be like Him for ever. "I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy likeness."

We have to do with him on the bed of sickness; we have to do with Him in the dark valley; we have to do with Him when the spirit goes forth all alone into the dread immortality—and yet not alone, for His rod and staff comfort us; we have to do with Him in the company of the spirits of the just made perfect; you will have to do with Him when the trumpet shall sound, when the dead shall arise, and when the great white throne is set in the midst of heaven, and all nations shall be gathered together before it; you will have to do with Him when His word pronounces the sentence of the death that never dies, or the life that never ends. Who would not say, "let me have to do with my God in peace?" Ah! brethren, how sweet it is to see even the young oftentimes have to do with God. There was one you knew,—some of you,—a young person who was in the morning of her days, with prospects opening around her; you have known her in the Sunday school, as humble, earnest, and attentive; from her confirmation she walked humbly, peacefully, modestly, quietly, as becomes a Christian, and all at once, as we should think it, consumption, that "secret worm i' the bud," that has nipped many a fair flower, came to her. Was she afraid, or alarmed, or startled? No, no; she heard the footfalls of the Lord she loved behind the king of terrors, and they dissipated all fears; and she beautifully said, shortly before

she died, "O blessed Jesus, Thou art coming for me." Yes, brethren, we shall all soon be brought into similar circumstances. Oh! what a blessing to have to do with God in Christ, who, "by His death hath destroyed him that had the power of death," and by rising to life hath restored us to life!

I need not apply the subject; it applies itself. To the sinner I would say, while you forget that you have to do with God, it cannot be well with you; for you forget that which is your happiness, and the happiness of all rational, intelligent beings. And O, Christian brethren, do not many of you forget God, when you sorrow as those without hope? Why are you driven to such distress? why are you so disquieted when God has to do with you? Go into your closets; meet Him there; spread your sorrows before Him; cast all your cares upon Him! take Him for your strength and hope, and you will find that He will have to do with you, unworthy though you be. Take this short, simple sentence with you, day by day, when you go to bed at night, when you awake up in the morning, when you go forth into the business of life, and its temptations and perils, for a shield to defend you, and a light to guide you and cheer you, and a lamp to direct you—My God, I have to do with Thee! That thought is enough, surely, to check us in sin; to cheer us in duty; to solace us in sorrow; and to enable us so to pass through things temporal, that, finally, we gain the things eternal.





V.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR LANGUAGE: IDLE WORDS.

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”—ST. MATT. xii. 36, 37.

SOME of you will remember the very instructive incident recorded of a heathen philosopher. Being sent by his master to market to bring him back the best thing he could find there, he brought him a tongue; and being sent to bring him the worst thing he could find, he again brought home a tongue. There was much truth and point in the act; and it seems to echo the testimony of inspiration, for we find David in one of his psalms saying, “I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have,” speaking thus of his tongue; and then we find St. James in the New Testament saying, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.” It is, then, on the one hand, if rightly used, the best member we have; and, on the other hand, if wrongly used, it is the worst member we have. And so it is with whatever God gives us; the better the thing is, if rightly used, the worse it becomes if misused. And, perhaps, there is no member that God has given us, that we so much misuse as that “little member” that “boasteth great things.” It is a marvelous member—a world of mystery. The power of vocal and intelligent speech seems peculiar to man amongst the crea-

tures ; we only can reach it, and understand it ; and it is such a power, that without it man would be an undeveloped being ; without it we should be little better than

“Seal’d up fountains that could not flow,
Fossilized trees that could not grow.”

Alas ! that a member of so much moment should be often so disregarded, and so allowed to run riot, and to follow the devices of its own wayward fancy and will, or rather the will of men ! How few, comparatively, make a habitual conscience of their language ; how few take care that their language should be a reflection of their thoughts and feelings ; that what they express is what they feel, and that what they feel is what they ought to feel, and is according to truth ! How few there are that think their words are of much importance ! They think, what is in a word, and say, as I have heard foolish people say, “If we had nothing worse than our words to answer for, happy would it be for us.” You continually hear people justifying themselves when they have said something unkind, or untrue, or uncourteous, or false, or backbiting, by saying, “I did not mean it.” What is that but to acknowledge to their shame, that they used language to which they did not attach any meaning, which had no idea connected with it. Did not mean it ! Your words *should* have a meaning ; if they have not here, they will be found to have when God comes to reckon with you. One of the largest and most important branches of human responsibility is connected with the tongue. It may be said to be the index of the mind, the channel—and one of the main channels—of the fountain of the heart. It is one of the truest criterions of a man’s folly or of his wisdom ; of a man’s truthfulness or of his falseness ; of a man’s weakness or the reverse. The wicked Pharisees had been bringing against the Redeemer the vile accusation that He was in league with

Satan, and that He cast out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of devils. Jesus, in rebuking them, takes occasion to trace down this outburst of their iniquity to the wellspring of their polluted hearts, and to trace all their conduct to its fountain-head. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things;" and then He adds the most solemn and impressive lesson with regard to the regulation of our speech which you have hearkened to, and on which we purpose to dwell:—"I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Our responsibility for our language; that is the first point: *The effect that our language shall have in the decisions of our destiny in the great day*; that is the next point. May God by His Spirit apply to our hearts the lessons of His divine truth on this vital point; and may we set a watch before our mouths, and keep the door of our lips.

Our responsibility for our language.—"I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Let us not make light of this. Some people will think it is a very extravagant and strong expression; that it is "a hard saying, who can bear it?" that it is a strictness and rigour it is impossible for man to reach, and that, therefore, it is to no purpose for man to attempt it. But this is not the language of fellow-worms, of men who may be obeyed or disobeyed at pleasure; it is not the decision of one who does not know what is in man; but of One who knows what is in man, and what He will require of man, when He comes to reckon with His servants. "*I say.*" Who says? He says whose words cannot be changed, or altered, or evaded, or denied, or resisted; He

says it, and when He speaks, who shall contradict? when He commands, who shall withstand? "*I say unto you.*" It is He whom every eye shall see; it is He with whom we must reckon when He summonses us to His bar; and then who can escape, who can refuse, who can resist? "*I say.*" Shall we then dare to call into question what our Lord and Master, and Creator, and Preserver, and Ruler, and Judge says? Shall we listen to the foolish words of our fellow-men, who are deceiving us; or shall we lend attention to His voice, who never speaks in vain, who never deceives, and never can be deceived? "*I say.*" Bear it in mind throughout this subject; and if you should be tempted to think these things are impracticable, remember that it is not a fellow-worm that says them, but him whose word made all things, whose power upholds all things, and who will determine all things. "I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." "*Every idle word.*" Mark the comprehensiveness of it! What! are we *never* to be off our guard? may we not *sometimes* speak at random? are we not at liberty sometimes? must we be continually seeking to have every word such as could be written down, such as will stand the inspection of the Eye that searcheth all things? We cannot endure such rigour and such control. How is a man to quiet his restless thoughts and words? The thought of this is impossible! Brethren, if you can find words that are not heard by God, then speak at random, then speak in folly, then speak without thought and without regard; but, remember, if you are talking in secret bad things, wicked things, if you are talking in secret subtle and designing things, if you are whispering beneath your breath to your companions words you would not like to be heard by those around you, remember that there is a Listener present whose ears hear every word—that Listener whose "book of re-

membrance" records all things—that Listener who will bring to your mind all things at a future day—that Listener who has to decide the evidence of your condemnation or salvation, of your acceptance or rejection. Bear that in mind. Now, if you can find a spot where that Listener is not present, or frame words that He shall not hear—if there are words that He disregards, that He will not bring to remembrance, then you need not take heed, then you need not set a watch before your lips, then you need not control the thoughts of your mind as they flow forth in the channels of your speech—you need not do it; but if, brethren, the comprehensive declaration of our Judge is, "*For every idle word* that a man shall speak he shall give an account," then, since God does not overlook any, you must not overlook any—since He gives attention to the least, you must not let the least escape your attention.

"For every *idle word*." The Greek signifies for every unprofitable word, every vain, foolish, or unmeaning word, every word that has no good purpose or end in it, every trifling, foolish, or frivolous word. Oh, how comprehensive! It startles us to think of it. Before you come to what is foolish, and vain, and trifling, and empty, and "jesting, which is not convenient," what a broad margin is behind. Truth must be the warp on which our speech is woven, or else it is rotten at the foundation. What a wide range of words of a profane, and I might say almost of a blasphemous nature; what a wide range of words of this kind, words that gush forth from a man's mouth continually. Then what a wide range of words, uncharitable, and unkind, and backbiting, and calumnious, and disparaging to others, of telling things for the sake of unkindliness, and from an evil disposition! what a range of words arising from envy, and jealousy, and discontent, and from a want of regard! what a range of words that flow forth from a want of feeling and of consideration for others! what hard

words, what reproachful words, what cruel and piercing words! Oh, what a range! And yet a range that men deal in and disregard, though they must come into the account, if for every idle word a man must give an account, if all must be included in the reckoning. Yes, even that thoughtless, foolish, vain word that a man says, with, perhaps, no wrong meaning or with no wrong feeling in it. Oh, what a wide catalogue must there be of such words! Remember, if such words have not been repented of and confessed, if such words have not been washed away in the blood of atonement, what a dark register stands against us! Then, my dear brethren, remember this, for every idle word that a man speaks, he must give an account; and, therefore, it will never do for a man to make no conscience of his words, to have no regard to his speech and language. If the tongue be left to run riot, it is impossible but that a man must say a great deal that is untrue, a great deal that is unkind, and unwise, and unfair, and uncharitable, and dishonest, and dishonourable of others. Christ says, "For every idle word"—there is no exception—for every word—"a man shall give an account *at the day of judgment.*" Therefore, there is a reckoning coming. The multitude of words we have fly away, like the leaves that rush from the forest in the autumn season, when they have been stirred by the wind; we think they are gone, and they are forgotten altogether. But Oh, the infinitude of God; they are not gone, they are somewhere registered. Ah! they are somewhere, and they are a reality. They cannot be seen and traced here by the mind of man, but they *will* be seen and remembered; and what a remembrance it will be to many a man, when he must go over the whole record of his thoughts and words and ways with God; what a dark record it will be! "For every idle word, a man shall give account in the day of judgment."

Then, brethren, the solemn inference that follows is, that

our words will have a mighty influence in the decision of our destiny in the great day. “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” We must not mistake the word. Justification is used sometimes in one sense and sometimes in another. Sometimes it is applied to our acceptance before God, and sometimes to the evidence to prove that acceptance ; for God is pleased to judge our acceptance by results. We have ourselves to judge, to try, and to free by the words of our fellow-men, by our fellow-beings, for we shall stand before the whole intelligent universe of God, and our fellow-beings shall universally judge us, not by the state of our hearts before God, but by the evidence of our words which will be brought forth before all observing beings, so that there shall be proof that we are what God has declared us to be, justified beings. We must not confound our justification with our deeds, as though they were our peace, as though they produced our acceptance. They do not make our peace, but they evidence our peace : they do not merit God’s favour, but they flow from God’s free favour. When God gives justification in a divine sense, He will give it in a secondary sense ; and though a man’s works have nothing to do with justification in the foundation, they have everything to do with it in demonstrating and in evidencing it. “Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.” That is just the point. Therefore, justification here means evidence that we are justified—justified before the intelligent universe, justified before the heart-searching God : for if you are justified before God, you will be justified before the intelligent observers in the assembly of the great day. Now, says Christ, who will declare that judgment, “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” It follows, therefore, that the language of people is one of the strongest indications of the state of their

hearts, of their state before God ; and that, consequently, their language and their words will largely determine, evidence, and prove whether they are justified or remain condemned. If justified through faith in Christ, then their words will become evidence of their justification ; if unjustified, then their words will continue evidence of their condemnation ; so that into the account of the great day will enter most essentially and most extensively human words, the general tone and tenor of a man's language, whether false or true, whether uncharitable or kind, whether revengeful or prudent, whether neglectful or watchful, whether he made a conscience of his expressions or spoke at random ;—these things will largely enter into the decision of whether a man was justified or unjustified, condemned or accepted before God. And is it not meet and right that it should be so, that what a man's heart is his thoughts should indicate ? Therefore, a man's natural ebullitions through his appetites and desires, and the words of his heart, go largely to decide what is the prevalent tone, tenor, and spirit of a man's inner life ; and his words are what the figures are on the dial-plate of a clock face—they are not the movements of the machinery, but they are the indications of the movements of the machinery. You judge of the action of a timepiece by the indications of the figures on the face of the timepiece ; and so with man, the ordinary tenor of his discourse is an indication of the man's secret mechanism in his inner moral life. You may judge a man's moral state by the state of his tongue, by the way in which he ordinarily speaks. A man is foolish and frivolous if he talks foolishly and frivolously ; if a man is passionate, he speaks angrily ; if he is discontented and murmuring, he is pouring forth murmurings, and repinings, and complainings of everything but himself ; so a man having no control of himself, speaks on a sudden impulse and in a passion ; an irreverent and profane man speaks irreve-

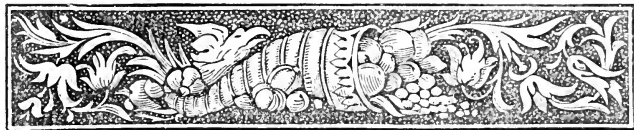
rently and profanely ; a man who has no regard for the conversation of others, talks as many a man is perpetually talking and weaving a web of verbiage—he affects, but never attains to anything. But have his words passed? have they gone away? is there no trace of them? have they left no impression? have they made no photograph on the invisible tablets of a man's account before God? Assuredly they have, and we must sooner or later meet these impressions of our words. If we have not come to a better tone, if we have not had them obliterated by the hidden blood, if we have not had the heart cleansed, if we have not had the tongue regulated and purified, how can we stand before our Judge? Let us remember this, and ponder over it—"That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." I again remind you that these are not our words; if they were, you would be apt to dispute them; but they are the words of Him whose voice will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed;" or, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" they are the words of Him whose words will fix our eternal destiny, our heaven or our hell for ever and ever. Therefore, beloved brethren, let us lay them to heart.

The words teach us many important lessons. Surely they teach us that there is a great deal in words. People say, "What is in a word? Do not make a man a sinner for a word;" but let us not forget what God makes a sin we must not make to be no sin—what He pronounces as a transgression we must not dare to try to clear from its character. It is God, and not you, who has to decide what is right and what is wrong; it is His standard that will measure us when we come before Him. Therefore, though people may say with trifling and folly, "Do not make a man a sinner for a

word," never allow—in yourselves, whatever you may do in others—that a word is a trifle. A word is a reality, it is the shadow of the substance. The substance is the thought, feeling, and temper within a man, and the words are the shadow. Where the shadow is, there is the substance. A man may say he is not foolish, though he talks foolishly; that he is not profane, though he uses the name of God disregardingly; that he is not impure and unclean, though he uses polluted language; that he is honest, and intends to do honestly, though he uses language of a spiteful, unfair, and fraudulent character; but, after all, we may deceive ourselves, though we cannot deceive the heart-searching God, who sees the inward thoughts and feelings that profess to be represented by the outward expressions. We must try to keep both in harmony. And then, brethren, do not say this is difficult. You find, no doubt, that it is for a little while. Man is on his trial in this world, and life must be a hard thing for you if you are to live for time and for eternity. No doubt, to many it is a struggle, but we must watch and pray. I will tell you how life may become comparatively easy. Regulate your thoughts in your heart, and your words will be in order; keep from unkind thoughts, and then bad words will not be uttered; make a conscience within, keep the fountain pure and the stream will be pure. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" and death. Be assured of it, it is a beautiful and a noble effort for a man to bring his speech into control and harmony with the Word of God; it is a noble attempt for a man to seek to make himself really and truly in earnest, and sincere, and upright before God. Then, do not forget this is a subject to humble us before God. Which of us but has reason to be ashamed and confounded to think of how much we have said and spoken foolishly, that He must have listened to with displeasure. Oh, how much we

have reason, therefore, to say, "Cleanse Thou me from my secret faults." How much reason we have to apply afresh to that fountain opened "for sin and all uncleanness," that cleanses from all sin, to cry out with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." How much reason we have to look for divine help and strength that we may follow out this high task of seeking to take heed to what we say. The prayer that occurred in the psalm this morning will be surely most appropriate to us—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips."

Oh, that angels might, as it were, watch and check the fountain! We cannot altogether help our thoughts. Satan will put bad thoughts into our minds, our own evil hearts will throw them up; but we can at least keep them from flowing forth, from gushing out; we can keep the channels if we cannot suppress the fountain, and we can prevent *them* being polluted. Let us take home this practical lesson, and act upon it, and carry it out. Not that we are to be precise, or stiff, or formal, but watchful, and truthful, and upright, and sincere; we are to seek to keep a harmony between the words of our lips and the thoughts of our hearts. This is surely not unreasonable, it is not a rigid, it is not a formal thing. It is what God requires by His divine law, and we may attain to it more and more, till at last we look forward to the great reckoning, and feel that, through His atonement, He is so strengthening us to become new creatures in tongue as well as in thought, that we may look forward without dismay to that great account, when by our own words we shall be justified or condemned.



VI.

UNBELIEF.

“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”—ST. LUKE xvi. 31.

IT is not want of evidence, it is want of inclination that hinders so many from believing. They are convinced to a certain extent, but they are not converted. Their understandings at all events are held in abeyance, and their wills are obstinately set against the reception of the truth. You will seldom find that a man will admit this, and so take the blame to himself. True to the first—or rather the second—sign of the fallen state in our first parents, he immediately tries to excuse himself, and, by thousands of devices, ever seeks to shift from himself the blame of his unbelief. Men want something more to convince them, they say, while in reality, they want the will to be convinced. All the evidence in the world would not overcome the enmity and the obstinacy of the carnal mind, which can only be overcome by the secret power of God. The Scriptures are very often assailed, because men want to neglect them, and treat them with indifference. They find fault with the word and the evidence that sustains it, in order that they may not have to find fault with themselves; they seek to shelter themselves in “a refuge of lies,” that they may make their escape from the refuge of truth; and the words you have heard this morning must surely have struck you as containing with intensest force and

accuracy truth spoken under special circumstances, though spoken in a parable. Parables may be, and are sometimes, to a certain extent, mere figures, and therefore not to be taken as facts; but the words and teaching of the Bible are invaluable truth, and what was spoken, therefore, as regarded representations in another world, was spoken for this world also, and for our learning. There is no communication between heaven and hell. When you leave this world, if you leave it out of heaven, you leave it never to communicate with heaven again. Perhaps communication was sought, in this case, by the rich man,—though we are not told it was,—with a view to tell his friends what torment they would endure if they came to that place of torment; or he wished to caution his brethren whom he had perhaps helped to dissipate, and he besought Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them, lest they should come to that place of torment. The answer was, “They have Moses and the prophets,” evidently implying that they were enough; but the poor wretched man answered, in unbelief and hardness of heart that must have followed him to hell, “If one rose from the dead they would believe;” there would then be irresistible conviction, and that, therefore, salvation must follow from that conviction. And then Abraham answered in the language of Jesus—for it was Jesus who put that language into his mouth in the parable—“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Let us just think—*what Moses and the prophets teach*:—let us think *what one that rose from the dead would teach*, and weigh them together:—and then let us see *what is the true reason why they that have Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, do not receive the truth and be saved*. May God by His Spirit apply His truth to our minds and hearts, that we may not hear it to our condemnation, but to our salvation and edification, for Christ’s sake.

There is no man who searches Moses and the prophets, who searches with any fairness or any understanding whatever, but must come to the conclusion that all is given to us that is necessary for us to know in our present condition, in order to our preparation for another state of being ; in order to understand the grace by which that preparation is to be accomplished. For what could we desire to know with regard to the world to which we are going, and our relationship to it ; what could we desire to know in regard to our duty in connexion with that future world ; what could we desire to know in regard to our relationship to the great God that created us and upholds us in being, who reigns over all, and who will call us to give an account in the last day ; what could we desire to know in regard to our present condition as fallen beings, of how and whence our fall, and of what our condemnation is in our fallen state ; what could we desire to know with regard to the will and law of Him that rules over us, and according to which we shall be judged ; what could we desire to know with regard to the provision that the covenant of mercy has made, in order to deliver us from our ruined condition ; what could we desire to know in regard to the person, history, and work of the great Deliverer ; what could we desire to know in regard to His character, in regard to His wondrous and mysterious combination, God and man in one ; what could we desire to know in regard to that gift of all gifts, His Holy Spirit, which He obtained for us, and which He sends to all those that are saved ; what could we desire to know in regard to the promises, and words of consolation and support that He has provided for us, and is ready to impart to all them that come to God by Him ; what could we desire to know in regard to our death, what it is, whither we are going, and what becomes of us ; what could we desire to know in regard to the future despair of the lost, of the hell of the wretched,

or the heaven of the blessed ; what could we desire to know of the consummation of all things, of the resurrection from the dead, of the final judgment, and the decision that will fix the doom of the lost in torment, and of the blessed in the fulness of joy ; what could we desire to know that we have not in Moses and the prophets, in Christ and the apostles ? A man may perhaps say, " There are many questions I should like to ask, there are many difficulties I should like removed, there are many points wrapped in obscurity, and I should like to see them cleared up." But the question is, not what we like, but what we *ought* to like ; not what will gratify our curiosity and pamper our intellectual pride, but what we need to know in order to know Jesus Christ ; in order that we may be recovered from our ruin, and raised to our just and higher condition ; in order that we may please God, and glorify Him ; in order that we may answer the purpose of our creation, and find happiness and rest for our souls ; what we need to know in order to our duty and destiny. If any man fairly examines the Bible with humility and prayer, and does not find abundantly sufficient to meet humble inquiry,—not vain curiosity,—then, and then only, may he begin to doubt whether Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, are sufficient for man's satisfaction and salvation. When you meet with a man who patiently and perseveringly, and with his whole heart, follows in the way he finds to be his duty, and at the last finds himself shipwrecked in the dark, then you may begin to find fault with Moses and the prophets, but not till then. No man has a right to come to a judgment and conclusion, until he has given all diligence to that great study which its infinitude demands. If a man's soul, and salvation, and eternity are at stake, can he be too earnest, too devout, or too bent upon finding and following the truth ?

Let us just think for a little. Suppose we had what some

men think would convince them, what some think it would be impossible to resist ; suppose a man *did* come from the dead, could he tell us more, or so much—anything like so much—as Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, have communicated to us ? He could tell us there is a hell ; have *they* not told us so ? He could tell us there is a heaven ; have *they* not told us so ? “ Verily there is a reward for the righteous ; verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth.” He could tell us that we are born in our iniquity, and that if we remain fallen to the last, we shall be fallen for ever ; he could tell us that there is no virtue or power in man to make his peace with God, to restore himself from the wrath of God ; he could tell us there is a way of reconciliation and peace, which has been in sovereign mercy provided for us and prepared for us—that it is only by that one way that any man can come to the Father, and escape the wrath to come ; he could tell us of the glorious resurrection, and of the wondrous and blessed state of those who are “ accepted in the beloved ;” but have *they* not told us this ? Yes. But you may perhaps think, after all, we should be certain if one rose from the dead. In Christ’s time men *were* raised from the dead as in the case of Lazarus ; but were people convinced ? On the contrary, they sought to lay hands on Jesus. The enmity of the carnal mind is not overcome by mere evidence—it is not evidence a man wants. Besides this, those who saw Christ risen from the dead, saw miracles and demonstrations quite as clear as any one coming from the dead to us could give us. Suppose we saw such a thing and reported it, and told it to our neighbours and friends, they might, with just as much fairness and justice, say, “ We cannot believe you—we have not seen it ourselves.” What would this come to ? Why, every one must walk by sight, and not by faith ; every man would believe nothing but what he sees and hears. What poor narrow-minded, debased

creatures we should be, even in the things of ordinary life, in the things of science, in things that concern the world, in far distant events, if we acted not upon testimony! We are persuaded on testimony, we are satisfied on testimony, and "if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." He that "believeth not the record" hath made God a liar.

Then, why do not men yield to the witness, if the testimony, or the evidence, be abundant, and the revelation full, satisfactory, and plain; why do they not? And here we come to the great point—the solution of the difficulty. It is not an intellectual difficulty. "Neither will men be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." There is a difference between a man being convinced and a man being persuaded. It has passed into a proverb, and it is a very just one, as most proverbs are,—

"The man convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still."

Have we not examples of that in ordinary life? How many will doubt and deny a thing, and try to explain it away, because it is contrary to their inclination. They believe not, because they won't believe, and it is impossible to make them believe.

There is a wide difference between a mere intellectual conviction or belief, and a moral belief. There is this difference. A man believes a thing; he believes that two things are equal. He has no hesitation in believing it, for it involves no consequences, it does not require any self-denial; but humble him, and bring him low, and oblige him to give up anything, and it is *very* different. If you require him to believe that "the soul that sinneth it shall die," that "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" that if a man believe not he shall "perish everlastingly;" it is a very different thing for a man to be brought to believe *that*, I mean not intellectually, but morally—that is, so that it acts upon him, and he acts upon it, and is constrained to act upon it.

There is a man's pride, his unbelief, and his enmity against God, rising up in rebellion. It is not that a man has not conviction, he has not inclination; and so long as he remains in that state of disinclination, all the evidence in the world will not change his spirit and will. It is his inclination, and desire, and will that need to be subdued and brought into submission. Men are continually saying, "I cannot believe," when they ought to say "I will not believe;" men are continually saying, "If there were evidence enough, I could not help believing;" though the truth is, if they had all the evidence in the world they could not believe, so long as they are in their present unbelieving and unsubmitive state of mind. Therefore, great stress is to be laid upon the word which Abraham uses. If he had said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be *convinced*, or yield consent, though one rose from the dead," he would not have been consistent in what he said; because, if one came from the dead, we must at least be convinced that there is another world, for he who had ceased to exist amongst us had come forth again into the visible world in a palpable state. But should we be a whit nearer fleeing from our sin and seeking the Saviour, and preparing to meet our God as the object of life? I trow not! Unless a change has passed over our inward and moral disposition, unless we are "willing in the day of God's power," unless the "truth has been received in the love of it," unless we have become submissive, unless we receive the truth with a wish to follow it, unless we receive it, as Christ said in the parable, "into good ground;" then, and not till then, shall it "take root and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty fold, and some a hundred fold." The stress, therefore, is to be laid upon this, "neither would they be *persuaded* though one rose from the dead." He does not say neither would they be *convinced*, he does not say neither would they *assent*.

There are thousands and tens of thousands assent to the Bible for one who is persuaded by the Bible ; but if a man is not persuaded, of what use is his assent? Does it not rather condemn him? does it not leave him more inexcusable, because he assents, and yet contradicts his assent, and gives himself the lie? He gives the lie to his understanding, and his evil heart of unbelief makes him hold the truth in unrighteousness—admit it in theory, but deny it in practice.

“Neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” This is as philosophically true as it is theoretically true, as indeed is always the case in the Word of God when fairly understood. The more you examine, the more you will find that it is the moral disposition, the state of the heart more than the state of the head, that influences a man in unbelief. You no sooner find a man, for instance, who was well disposed, seeking to serve God, and walking blamelessly, keeping himself unspotted from the world, begin to give way in his moral disposition—get drawn into doubtful society—indulge in pleasures, than his conscience upbraids him for them, then he begins to find excuses for himself, and he begins the scorn of the scorner. His downward path is graphically sketched in the 1st Psalm ; first, he “walks in the counsel of the ungodly ;” next he “stands in the way of sinners ;” and going lower and lower, at last he “sits in the seat of the scornful.” The first, and therefore the grand point in the right study of the Bible,—one of its evidences,—is the moral disposition, and not the purpose, with which a man does it. Says not the Saviour the same thing? “If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will show them his covenant.” Again, “The meek will he guide in judgment ; the meek will he teach his way.” And again, “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths they have not known ; I will make darkness light, and crooked

things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." Yes ; and God says by Jeremiah, "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Again, "Except a man be born again," and become as a little child, "he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Jesus took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Except ye become as this little child, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." And, therefore, brethren, the more we consider the words thus uttered by Christ, the more we must admit that, though we may be unwilling to take blame to ourselves, and to apply the guilt to ourselves, yet what they say is the truth, and will be found so when we come into the world of light. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets," and with what emphasis may we add, if they hear not Christ and the apostles, "neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." I have known people wish they had some sign or miracle—some irresistible, as they say, and overpowering demonstration. Ah! it is a mistake. You may like it, but the question is, would you be willing to be convinced if you had it? People often think that they would, but they do not know the deceitfulness of the heart. They do not wish to be convinced, as they assert ; they do not desire to be detached from sense, to deny themselves to take up their cross and follow the Saviour. Let the inclination be rectified, and the conviction will be strengthened, and "he who runs may read." It is wonderful how some get wisdom, perception, and influence from the Word of God, that philosophers, critics, and learned professors oftentimes lack. After all, what are critical knowledge and acumen? Of what avail is it that a man is able to discourse upon and write upon the Bible, if he carries in his breast a heart unactuated by the principles, unrenewed by the power, uncheered by the promises, unsustained by the hopes, unbrightened by the prospects of a glorious immortality? The poorest, simplest,

humblest beggar, who has realised the power of the faith of God, is more philosophical and learned in the estimation of the angels in heaven, than the most elaborate doctor of divinity who finds no comfort, no hope, no holiness in his Bible. Therefore, brethren, if you want more evidence, you have much more reason to suppose you want more inclination. It was the decision of a very holy man, who was one of the first of our lawyers, and therefore accustomed to weigh evidence, that there is more evidence for the truth and veracity of the Bible than all the evidence found in any case ever tried in the world, or ever brought into a court of justice ; therefore you cannot too much lay this to heart, that it is not the fault of the revelation, it is not the paucity or insufficiency of the revelation, it is not the obscurity, or the weakness of the evidence, but it is the moral condition of our hearts ; it is not because there is not sufficient evidence that so many do not believe, but it is because their inclination stands in the way ; it is not so much that the Bible is doubted or denied, as that it is attempted to disparage and disguise it. But "let God be true, and every man a liar." Then, brethren, if you would receive your Bible so that you may be persuaded, you must receive it with submission, with meekness, with prayer, with honest earnestness. You must "ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not," to give you wisdom, and it shall be given to you. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith," with a full persuasion, "nothing wavering." Let him make up his mind, and not go to God and ask for what he does not intend, but ask, when he has made up his mind, nothing wavering. "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." If a man inquires after the truth in a weary, half-hearted mind, he cannot receive it—it will be hidden from him ; but if a man sets about it with the earnest, honest.

resolution that nothing in the world shall hinder him from finding the truth, if he is resolved and determined, if he has made his choice, difficulties clear away, and it is wondrous how doubt vanishes. Then let us remember that a man is responsible for his inclinations ; for, after all, if there were not moral guilt in some way incurred, there would be no blame for unbelief. It would seem to be, so far as we may presume to judge, that unbelief of all things should condemn a man ; but, according to modern sceptics, unbelief is a kind of thing for which man is not responsible at all—that a man cannot help. “ If there is evidence,” say they, “ he believes ; if there is not evidence, he does not believe, and it is the fault of the evidence.” Yes, if you can think it is so ; but philosophy itself ought to teach you, that in moral truth the inclination, the heart, the moral affections, the passions, have almost everything to do with the persuasion and conviction, so that if it is moral guilt, it is a subject of the highest blame. It is the very joint on which man’s responsibility for immortality hinges. “ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Therefore, do not be cheating your own souls to utter and everlasting loss, by reason of any such vain notion as that a man is not responsible for his faith. He is responsible according to the degree of moral influence that affects his faith, or unbelief, or infidelity. It is not the fault of a man’s head or understanding that he does not believe, it is the fault of his heart ; it is still the “ evil heart of unbelief,” and therefore “ with the heart man believeth.” How earnestly we should seek and pray, then, for that clean heart and right spirit, so that our inclinations and desires, as well as our convictions, may be set on God’s truth, and that we may so receive Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, that at the last we may be found in Abraham’s bosom, and not with the rich man, where hope never comes, and fear comes to all.



VII.

THE STRONGHOLD OF THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life.”—PROVERBS iv. 23.

THERE are few figures more frequently employed in Holy Scripture to represent the Christian course than the figures which relate to warfare. We are thus reminded that we are not to expect the path of quietness without the path of conflict, that we are not to expect to reach the crown except we bear the cross, that we are not to expect to gain the victory except we maintain the struggle. Very fitly and appropriately is the young immortal, when enlisted into Christ’s army, “signed with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil ; and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end.” Very fitly, I say ; because if he has to serve Christ, he must fight in order to serve, and he must serve in order to fight. The world, the unbelieving, those who look to the outward course, may doubt it ; they do doubt this representation of the Christian life. They have little struggle, because it is all one way with them ; they have not to battle with the stream, because they glide along with it ; they have not to row hard, because instead of opposing the currents, they leave themselves to be carried along by them. Besides, the conflict of the Christian does not lie so much without as

within, not so much with the broad outer world as with the little world in the breast. If a man maintain not the conflict there, if he maintains it only outwardly, it is a mockery, an unreality; but if he maintain it there, he maintains it indeed, for he maintains it under the eye of his Captain.

There are few words more weighty, and that need more to be sounded in the ear of the Christian warrior, than the words you have listened to: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." The passage calls our attention to *the stronghold the Christian sentinel and soldier has to keep*:—*the vital importance of keeping that citadel*:—*the way in which that citadel is to be kept*. "Keep thy heart with all diligence." May He who requires truth in the inward parts, and searches the heart, vouchsafe to enlighten and guide us in this holy and needful struggle.

The citadel which the Christian has to guard: "Keep thy heart with all diligence." The heart of man is a wondrous mystery, a strange world in itself; its feelings, affections, desires, emotions, cravings, reasonings, wonderings, who shall tell them, who shall explain them? The description given of a fallen heart by Him who alone fully knows it is, that it is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." "Who can know it?" asks the omniscient Searcher of the heart. It is his prerogative and power alone. But the heart of which we are going to speak, that is given the Christian soldier in charge, is a heart that is renewed and yet unrenewed, that is holy and yet unholy, that is spirit and yet flesh. Such is the heart of every man that is born of the Spirit. His birth is perfect in its principles, and imperfect in its accomplishment. The germ is there, but all that is good of that germ has yet to be unfolded and perfected, and will not attain to its full development until it attains it in the kindly clime from which it has come forth

from above; never in this evil unbelieving nature. The description given of that heart is this, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other;" and one, who kept his heart as few have kept it, and who, therefore, knew it better than most have known it, tells us, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." As it is in military tactics, so it is in the Christian warfare, the heart is just the centre, the citadel of the whole Christian struggle; it is that the enemy without tries to carry, it is that the enemy within tries to yield, it is on that ground the battle rages most fiercely, it is there the Christian soldier has most stoutly to maintain his post. That it is so is very clear from the fact that the heart is that which Satan continually tempts. He does not tempt us by what is without, so much as by suggestions within. When he tempts us from without, it is that he may make a lodgement within. As with the fabled horse of Greece of old, formed of wood and filled with military men, the enemy were enabled by that stratagem to get within the walls of Troy; so it is the object of our enemies without, and more especially of the great enemy, the captain of our destruction, to introduce evil imaginations, bad desires, sinful feelings, into the citadel of the heart. It is the citadel above all that the flesh tries to betray; it is from within and "out of the heart" that "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts," covetousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness, these are the things that spring up in the heart. The description given by St. James of the process, is, "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." There is the process by which man is betrayed into evil, deserts his standard, and turns traitor. So long as the heart is kept, a man is comparatively safe;

for it is the key of the position ; his citadel is still within whose walls and ramparts are defended by God.

The importance of maintaining this citadel: " For out of it are the issues of life." It is a very remarkable and striking expression, and we may take it in two ways. Out of it are the issues of life in man's whole course and conduct ; and out of it, in the final result of a man's career and course of life. If we take it in the sense of the streams of life, the various courses of a man's pursuits, the various ways of a man's choice, the various changes of a man's character and conduct ;—they all proceed from within. This seems a self-obvious principle ; but most people are far too little alive to it. They think that if they keep a decent exterior it is all they have to do, and that if they stand well with their fellow-men they will stand well with God. It is most important, therefore, that though men know this, and admit it in theory, they should be reminded of it most constantly with regard to their practice ; because, how clear it is that to keep the outside only, even for this life, is unsound keeping. However you may keep the outside of a tree, if the root is decayed, if the fruit at its core is corrupt, it will not stand, its life must be extremely uncertain, and at any time it may, by the force of the blast, be laid low ; it is unsafe, because it is unsound at the core. In the same manner it is, if you regard man's ultimate acceptance with God : God looks at the foundation. The man who builds his house upon the rock may stand the flood and will not fear the storm, his foundation is sure and sound ; but there must come, and will come in every man's life, a time when the rain will descend, the winds will blow, and the storms beat against his house, then it cannot stand if founded only upon the earth, if it have no basis upon the rock. If the house is built upon the sand, it must fall ; but if it be built upon the rock, it will only be the more proved to be firm and

insubvertible. It is therefore clear that it is by attention to the inward life that you best secure the outward life ; it is clear that, sooner or later, if the inner life is neglected, the outward life will little avail ; it is clear that, though the lamps of the foolish virgins twinkle on and seem to shine, if there be no oil in the vessels with the lamps, the time will come when the flickering lights will fail, and the mere wicks will not maintain the shining. So likewise in the man who regards the issues of life in the light of their ultimate result in the sight of God, it is clear that, after all, it is what a man is in heart that he will be before God. The fabled fruit, that is said to grow upon the borders of the lake of the Dead Sea, as it is called, were said to be very beautiful and lovely to the sight ; they looked as if they were exceedingly luscious and mellow ; but if the people gathered them, and crushed them, and tried to eat them, they turned to bitter ashes in the mouth—they were hollow at the core. Is it not so with the seeming fruit of the hypocrite and self-deceiver ? It is fair to look upon, but at last, when gathered and crushed, it turns to loathsome ashes. It is essential, then, that the fruit that is to be presented to Him who is the husbandman of the vineyard should be sound at the core. It is evident that if the issues of life are to be life everlasting, if the stream that is made to spring up here in the heart in time is to issue on the ocean of fulness of joy and holiness at the right hand of God, it is essential that the stream should be kept pure, and flow on, still purifying as it comes nearer to its heavenly source ; and, therefore, nothing can be more clear, than that “out of the heart are the issues of life.” A man’s life is regulated by his heart. Even supposing that the life looks fair and plausible that is not sincere and sound, the man has the consciousness that he is not sound with God, his conscience bears him witness that he is not serving God with all his heart, therefore there

will be, after all, even in the evil and unsound course of a man's life, still the issue of his heart. His hypocrisy, his evil designs issue from his heart, his own secret purposes that are wrong issue from thence, and his own conscience will tell him this. How strikingly manifest this was in the case of Joseph's brethren! They had probably forgotten the treachery, the cruelty, the jealousy they had shown towards their poor brother, still these things were there. Like the letters written by the sympathetic ink, invisible till some chemical process or the fire is applied, when they appear; even so, there was a record on their consciences of those acts of cruelty and treachery, and though it lay dormant for many years, it came home to them when they were brought into sore distress; and when God placed them in circumstances kindred to those in which they had placed their poor brother, their conscience arrested them, and they said one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear." Thus you see how out of their hearts were "the issues of life," how their consciences called to their minds, in their distress and trouble, the guilt that was long perhaps forgotten, yet not blotted out.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." If the heart be kept, the man is kept, and it matters little what else a man keeps; for, after all, a man is what he is in principles, in desires, in emotions, and affections. The little world within concerns us more than the great world without, and it is upon the regulation, and the adorning, and the improvement of that, hinges a man's immortality, the moral man that must live for ever. And that little citadel within must be the scene of much conflict and struggle, much turmoil and disorder, which a man shrinks from contemplating. To have a new heart and a right spirit grounded in us, and then to maintain that new

heart against the old one, the spirit against the flesh, the new man against the old man, the stronghold that God has entrusted to the Christian warrior,—that is the grand end, and duty, and interest of man ; let him do but that, and he has attained to what is the duty and purpose of life, the grand hinge of life's happiness and eternity's hope. "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Keep it in mind, brethren, and when you find evil thoughts and proud imaginations stir in you, when you find yourselves beset with secret temptations from without, arouse yourselves ; awake ! Remember, "out of it are the issues of life." How very different your conduct is as you guard your heart ; therefore, how the heart should be guarded and kept. If the citadel is traitorous, if the parties in it are unloyal and unfaithful, and are plotting and planning how they may betray the citadel to the enemy ; and, if at the same time, the citadel is beleaguered by hostile foes around it who are continually assaulting it, the loyal party within the citadel, those who are in custody of it, those who are to maintain it in its safety, have a twofold duty to perform ; they have, on the one hand, to watch what is within ; and, on the other hand, they have to watch against what is without. They are to watch what is within, for there is more to fear from disloyal traitors than there is even from open adversaries ; because those within are in league with those without, and are watching their opportunity to open the gates, or to break down the most accessible part of the walls to allow the assaulting party to enter ; therefore it behoves the loyal party to have a jealous, watchful, and suspicious eye upon the traitorous party ; they must see what they are planning and plotting about, and defeat their evil designs, and take measures to render abortive all their most subtle stratagems. So, on the other hand, they must watch against the enemies without, lest they should surprise them and gain admission while the

watch is sleeping—lest they hold communication with the treacherous party within, and overthrow the guard, by taking advantage of some favourable moment. All this is a parable, but it is a picture of what is to be maintained by the Christian soldier who would be faithful. He knows well that it is the traitorous party within who are constantly seeking to betray him into unfaithfulness, and take advantage of his unwatchfulness to plunge him into temptation and sin ; he knows that, though he may sleep, his enemies within do not ; he knows that, though he may have his eye off their stratagems, they never cease or fail ; and he finds his old lusts, his old desires, his old passions, that he thought he had got rid of, or at least brought under, are still watching their opportunity, biding their time, and ready to show themselves as often as he gives them opportunity. Every Christian man must have been startled and astonished to find what proud thoughts, what evil imaginations, what sinful tempers, what wrong and wicked passions will struggle within him ! He is forgetting that they are not crushed, they are only restrained. They are there still, and therefore he cannot lay aside his armour, or close his eyes, or sleep upon his watch, or the traitorous heart within, and those who are without, Satan and the world, incessantly striving to co-operate with the enemy within, will overpower him. He is to guard the issues *out of* the heart, and the issues *into* the heart ; he is to watch against any enemy in disguise creeping into the citadel ; he is to guard against the enemies within issuing forth to join in union and league with the enemies without that besiege him ; he has, therefore, a twofold danger and a twofold duty ; he has to guard on the right hand and on the left hand. It is no easy duty, therefore, and it requires holy and vigilant diligence, in order to keep the door of the citadel, to guard it against surprise and betrayal,—betrayal within and surprise from without. Every

Christian soldier must be aware that it is only by constant vigilance that he can maintain the citadel and prevent its being betrayed. "Keep thy heart, therefore, with all diligence." The word in the Hebrew is very expressive. It is, "Keep it above all keepings," or "with all keepings." If you take it, "keep it above all keepings," it brings to us this thought,—beyond everything you guard over, guard and watch over your own heart,—that is the first point. People are to guard their tongues in what they speak; they are to guard their eyes in what they look upon; they are to guard their hands in what they touch; they are to guard their purposes, their plans, the company they keep, the amusements they allow themselves; they are to guard all these things; and he who does not keep a watch over them, is not living as a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, as a soldier in the enemy's country? But beyond and above all this, he is to keep the citadel—above all, keep *it*. Keep other things, but that is the grand point; if *it* is carried, the man is gone; if *it* is kept, the man is at least secure. He may be "cast down," but he is "not destroyed;" he may be "troubled on every side," yet he is "not forsaken," so long as that citadel is still in his possession, and in his patience and purity he possesses his heart and soul. And so, if you take it in the other way, "with all keepings," that is, on every side, in every thing. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; yet people are continually guilty of that folly, they are too apt to think that if a thing is pleasant, they may indulge themselves with it; and they are oftentimes led on, as they of Troy were, who were deceived by the wooden horse. Temptations often assume a different shape and appearance to get our friendship. As it was with the poor peasant, who is said to have taken the frozen viper, and placed it in a warm place to thaw it, and the first use it made of its regained strength and life was to fasten its poisonous fangs

in the peasant's heart, and to kill the man who had been its benefactor, so it is with the serpent of sin ; the evil temper, passions, desires, lusts in our heart, may seem to be frozen, but if we cherish them, they will revive again ; they may spring into life again ere we are aware, and fix their poisonous fangs in a man and destroy him. We must, therefore, ask those that come in what they are about ? we must ask them what is their errand ? if they are going to hold communion with those without ? if they are going into doubtful scenes of temptation ? if they are going into an atmosphere of danger that may appear, as it is described in "The Pilgrim's Progress," enchanted ground ? "Keep thy heart," keep it above all things ; "for out of it are the issues of life," and eternity hangs upon the result. As a man's heart is found at last, so man will be found before the heart-searching God, who "requirest truth in the inward parts."

You see, then, that viewing the Christian's life as a holy warfare, the scene on which we are to "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life," there could be no watchword given to the Christian sentinel that is more emphatic and needful than the watchword you have been listening to—"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Alas ! there are many who, instead of keeping their heart, leave its keeping to Satan. There are many such. Jesus himself so represents it. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace : but when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." That is the case with every man living a careless, worldly, and indifferent life, as if he had no soul to save, no eternity before him, no death at the door, no God to give an account to, no Saviour to see. Is it not so with many ? Their "goods are in peace," Satan gets the citadel of their hearts into false tranquillity. Better

the trembling of despair than this sleeping on the verge of eternal death. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." You should pray that God would give you the guardianship of your own hearts; you should fear alone His name, and power, and presence. And, therefore, brethren, before you can keep your hearts, you must get them. How few there are who have them! Their hearts are from under their control—they cannot count on themselves—they cannot tell what they shall be. Don't you think Hazael was honest, and thought he was right at the time, when forewarned of what should happen, and he said, indignantly, "Is thy servant a dog?" Dost thou think I am a dog? Yet when the time came, when the temptation came, he proved himself to be that dog, because he had not possession of his heart. Never, therefore, rest, till your heart is in your own keeping—in the keeping of your new man, in the keeping of Christ, in the keeping of the Spirit; then there is no danger, because you shall be kept as Joseph was, who beautifully said, in the passage we heard this morning, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" There was the sentinel at the gate, so the tempter was repulsed, and the temptation fell powerless to the ground. It is scatheless, if we do not allow it to penetrate into the citadel. If God has given you the keeping of your heart, it is your duty to keep it "above all keepings." How many fall because they allow their hearts to get out of their control, like the restive steed that could only be kept from the precipice on the one hand, by being bound tightly from the other side. They need the strong bit and the firm hand: they need to be kept in the straight path, for they are continually swerving out of it. "Keep thy heart," then, "with all diligence," and thou shalt get the rest. And let us just remember, these may seem hard things—many consider them so; but what are they for a few fleeting years? It is not

much to maintain this constant vigilance. Whose fault is it that this vigilance has to be exercised? It is man's own; it arises from the corruption of his nature; but in the end what will be the glorious issue? What will be the issue of leaving the heart to itself? "The worm that dieth not, and the fire that cannot be quenched." And what will be the issue of keeping the heart with all diligence? Pleasures for evermore, and fulness of joy, and an ocean of blessedness at the right hand of God. And do remember, that it is but a little time, and the struggle is over, the victory is complete, the enemy is dislodged for ever, and the heart is pure as it was when it came from its Maker's hand, and then, above all, the issues of immortal life will be the issues of purity, and joy, and triumph, and ecstasy, and love.





VIII.

PERFECT PEACE.

“When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when He hideth His face, who then can behold Him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.”—JOB xxxiv. 29.

STORMS may rush over the surface of the earth, and wreck the vessel on the ocean's waves, and yet the earth itself remain calm and comparatively unmoved; but let there be volcanic element or secret force, from whatever cause, within the heart of the earth, and it will shake like a bulrush. It is not so much the disturbance without, as the disturbance within, that occasions danger. It is not the vessel gliding through the waters, but the water entering into the vessel, that endangers it, and very often wrecks it altogether. It is in moral things as it is in natural. The greatest distresses that a man can suffer are from within—or are rather within; and the greatest comforts and consolations and joys of which a man can partake are those that are in him, as “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The great misfortune of most men is that they know this, but they act as though they did not know it. They are seeking their happiness in making outward circumstances, as they think, conduce to their happiness, and all the while they neglect their own hearts where happiness must dwell, for the things around them where happiness cannot be found. If they spent upon their own hearts and spirits the care and the pains they spend upon their outward circumstances, they

would be in the right way of happiness ; but not being freighted with “the peace which passeth understanding,” the poor frail bark is at the mercy of all the storms, and chances, and changes of this world, in which we have no certainty for the breath we draw. It is a beautiful representation of where true happiness may be found, and hence of how the utterest misery may be spared, which Elihu addresses to Job, brooding under misfortunes, and yet it is a sentiment in itself most sure, most sublime, and most infallible. He is turning the mind of Job to the true strength and centre and foundation of all righteousness and blessedness, and he says, in relation to the Almighty God : “When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble ? and when He hideth His face, who then can behold Him ? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.”

None can tranquillize those whom God troubles :—none can trouble those whom God tranquillizes :—this holds good in relation to nations, and in relation to men.—You will perceive at once that these three thoughts comprehend fully the meaning of the passage. Let us look to God, that He may guide our minds into that peace which the world cannot give, and save us from that wretchedness which never can be allayed, except by the mercy of God.

None can trouble those whom God tranquillizes.—One might imagine that the simple enunciation of such a sentiment would command universal assent, and that every rational creature would at once say “Amen.” That it is not so is because we are so strangely blinded, that though admitting the truth, the admission goes for nothing as regards the practical effect. And, therefore, it is that “line upon line” must be penned, and “precept upon precept” uttered. People will say, “I have heard that before.” Yes, but have you followed it ? Till you follow it, you cannot too often hear it ; and you have heard it to no purpose, if it carry not

simply your assent, but your obedience. Hence it is that we need often to say with the apostle, "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." Not the hearer only, but the doer of the word "shall be blessed in the deed." How often have you heard and assented to this sentiment, and yet are not acting upon it, nor are honestly and earnestly attempting to act upon it,—if God giveth quietness, none can make trouble? It is not enough for you to assent to this, you must be persuaded of it, and be resting upon it, and setting your whole heart upon the pursuit, or you will be lost at the last.

"If God giveth quietness." Let us just for a moment look at ourselves, at what we are, at what God made us. Do we not find that there is something in us that wants something beyond and above all that a man is born to and pursues? The men who live in neglect of God, of their soul, and of their salvation, are not generally the most prosperous and the most successful, but the most sensual, the most worldly, the most brutalized, and the most debased; and, themselves being the judges, they have an apprehension and an uncertainty, and a feeling of universal instability very often comes upon them, and would more often still, if they did not ward it off and keep it at arms' length, and keep in abeyance what they dare not look steadily in the face. Is a man quite rational to rest his happiness where alone he is afraid to look—afraid to look too far or too high, because he feels that his happiness rests upon a quagmire and a quicksand, and is tottering to its fall, and great will be the fall of it? Can a man be said to have reasonable and intelligent happiness, whose happiness is set in such a fashion? And yet, yourselves being the judges, such is the best happiness of the most prosperous and the most successful, and the strongest you know of your acquaintance; that is all he can call his own. Besides, brethren, we must recollect it is not merely

the uncertainty of our lives and the brittleness of our joy that is wrapped around our heart's fondest affections ; it is not merely that there is a positive distemper in our souls ; there is a positive want of harmony in our relations, there is a want of accordance with Him who made us, and with His dealing in making us, and with our own marvellous capacities, and the powers with which He has endowed us, with our real destiny and the duty before us in this world, and with our anticipations of the immortality to which we are hastening ; there is altogether about a man's whole moral being a something out of harmony, and altogether discordant with what we were intended to be. And, not only so, but in the happiness based upon things seen and sensual, there is such a sense and apprehension of guilt about a man, that he dare not look it in the face. He may make himself, if he please, very comfortable for a season, while health and spirits last ; he may shut out all beyond him, and all above him, and all before him in the excitement ; he may, it is true, to a certain extent, keep under and out of sight altogether those uneasy feelings that tell him there is something wrong in his relations to judgment, and eternity, and death, and the Deity ; he may, for the greater portion of his life, keep these things at arms' length, but he is obliged to make an effort ; for if he thought too closely, it would make him unhappy, so he gets rid of all that reminds him of death and tries to abstract himself from it. I have seen men in the death-chamber, with the coffin containing a young friend or relation before them ; I have seen men stand at the grave side, and hear the echo of "earth to earth," and be just as insensible of their own death as if they were in the house of feasting and mirth. Oh, marvellous infatuation of man's mind, to thus dare to abstract himself from God ! The very evidence that we have men thus keeping out of sight the Almighty, is a most strong indication that a man is not

happy at the thought of death, and does not wish to die—that he is afraid to die, that he does not like to meet his God, and that he shrinks back from the dread interview. He may try to steel his conscience, and delude his reason, and make a boast of things, and talk about things God has never revealed to him; still, there is that in the heart that implies uneasiness, and it would be deeper and darker if he would have the manliness to look it in the face. Now then, brethren, while a man is in that state of mind, I grant he may have mirth and laughter, but he cannot have the peace the world cannot give. A man may bring himself to such a state of mind as to say, “If I could live always as I am, and make the best of life, I should be content.” Ah! but that cannot be; we have no choice. We cannot say “it will be what I elect,” but it must be what God has appointed.

Thus, brethren, we have glanced at how a man who is thus troubled within him cannot have abiding comfort and joy without; and much more, if God trouble, what will be the state of a man’s mind? How soon God may trouble, how soon He will and must trouble, and prove the truth, and law, and justice of His moral government; but if He make quietness, who can trouble? How can He make quietness? By bringing man back to God’s original purpose, by restoring him to His favour, by accepting him in the atonement He has provided, by giving him rest on the “Rock of ages,” by giving him His Spirit, by changing his mind, his views, his principles, his purposes, and by making him from being a poor grovelling creature of the earth for three score years and ten at the most, to become an “heir of Christ,” a “child of God,” having all things in having Him. By fastening on Christ as the anchor, the poor little bark, though it must for a season be tossed on the billows, yet, because it is attached to the sheet anchor, it cannot drift or be at the mercy of the waves; though the little vessel may be tossed, it cannot be

wrecked ; for the anchor holds it safe. Oh, for a man to have that "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast!" for that gives him "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," and enables him to say, "Though all around me leave me and forsake me, I have One 'mighty to save,' who will not betray me, who will not at the last leave me to the mercy of the yawning deep, but I shall be safe in His keeping, until I am drawn into the haven whither He wafts me. I have feelings of joy and peace that will last for ever." Surely, if God himself puts, as it were, the shelter of His mighty hand over the poor little feeble spirit of man, He can shield it so that none can harm it, and He can stay it, so that none can destroy it. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." He is "mighty to save," He giveth the "peace which passeth all understanding," and "not as the world giveth." If He giveth quietness, who can trouble? Listen to the songs of the prisoners laden with chains, and lacerated with the scourge at the midnight hour! What mean those songs of praise? Will scoffing sceptics tell us they were the result of delusion or enthusiasm? Would they produce a triumph such as that? Does your infidelity ever give you the spirit that their blessed faith in Christ gave when, amid the clanking of chains there was heard the voice of prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving? Surely it stands to reason, and every man who has any thought must see it, that no man can be at peace despite of God, and no man can be miserable, notwithstanding God's peace and favour. We deny our creation, we deny the Deity, and are atheists, if we do not admit the truth of that. Man admits it, and allows it, but does not follow it to realise it in its effects. Should a man rest, and be quiet—should he be at ease, until he can look forward to peace at the last?

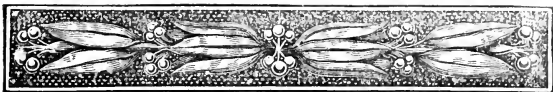
We hasten to show the dark converse: "Who can tranquillize, if God troubles?" Surely this follows. He who has all the powers, and faculties, and springs of man at the touch of His finger, can, by a thought, torment a man; and not only when he is afflicted by disease, but when he is in the possession of health, He can just flash upon his conscience a terror and a remorse, that will make him like the proud Assyrian king, when his loins loosed their bands, and his knees smote together, and he was a poor miserable wretch. Yet there was no apparent danger, there was no torment without. It was the torment within: the volcano is *there*, the element is within, the "worm that never dies" is within. If it lies in dread remorse and fearful despair, and dark self-condemnation, there needs no ill without. Yes, brethren, if God troubles, who can tranquillize? And surely man cannot complain if God lets him alone. If a man "rushes upon the bosses of the buckler," he must not complain if he is dashed to pieces. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." That is the language of the meek and lowly Saviour himself. You have often heard and read, and history furnishes us with many examples, of men who have been tormented and agonised. It was simply God hiding his face from them. Who can look upon the anger of the Deity? It is a fearful strife with us. "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" As if a poor creature like man should raise his little puny arm against his omnipotent Creator! Fear not them "that kill the body," but "fear Him which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell." Oh, what a mad contest it is for a man to act in determined opposition to his conscience! What will he do in the end? Should not a man always fall low before his merciful Creator; melted by His goodness, as overcome by

His power? Surely it is meet and proper to say, "I have suffered chastisement, for I have sinned—I will sin no more; what I know not, teach thou me." Is it not better to do that in time, than amidst the tears and the uneasiness of the death chamber? Is that the time? I hear of one and another being struck down in a moment. One very recently was taking his part in debate, full of energy and activity of mind, and he said, just the day before, "I never was in such strength, I think I shall live to see upwards of eighty years," and he dropped down an unconscious corpse. How little any of us have to count upon! Is any man quite certain of to-morrow? Can any one say, "It is time enough for me, I am so strong and in health?" It is not blind fear of death, it is not anxiety about death, that is meant by God in the words, "Oh that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" What is meant is, that they should so consider it, that at the last all shall be calm and tranquil. Let the great business be settled, and all the rest will follow in peace, and move in harmony; let the great business be unsettled, and all is uncertain. Man unprepared to die, is a grand mistake.

Then let it be remembered this is true, not less with regard to nations, than with regard to individuals. If you want an example, read to-night the history of God's people Israel, of which the excellent Rev. Thomas Scott has said, "It is God's experimental trial of human nature." You will find that the history of Israel is like a diorama, reflecting continually light and shadow as it moves. When Israel followed God and did His will, you will see that God was with them, and nothing could be against them. Then victory was easy, for "the Lord fought for His people," and "the stars in their courses" fought the battles of the faithful; but when God was forsaken, then at the rebuke of ten they fled. Angels came down to battle for them while they were loyal to their God; but when they turned their backs to the Al-

mighty, He turned His face from them. I grant we have not now the unfailing secret springs that moved the affairs of nations as the Israelites had ; but what is revealed in their case, holds good by analogy, and in our case may be used as a thermometer of safety and success as a nation. Be assured of it, that as truly as God reigned over Israel, He reigns over Britain ; and He reigns over all the nations of the earth. Now, above all nations, we are ostensibly and confessedly in covenant with Him ; and I would to God that our nation more and more looked to her Maker and Almighty Ruler. Be assured of this, the events now taking place in Europe, have a strong light thrown upon them by prophecy, to which we shall do well to “take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.” However prosperous and peaceful we may be—and we bless God for internal peace—be assured of it, Europe is already charged with the elements of fearful convulsions, and there are strong indications that a tremendous storm is coming. Happy will it be for England, if she so serves God, if she so acts wisely, and prudently, and uprightly, and honestly, and truthfully, that she may say, “If He makes quietness, who can trouble?” “The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Then, indeed, though she should be chastened, she shall not be abandoned ; though storms may rage around her shores, she will be kept in comparative safety and peace, not simply by her armies and navies, by the arm of flesh, but because she is still under the banner and shield of the Omnipotent. It is as true of nations as of individuals, that if God giveth quietness, none can trouble. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

Seek then, brethren, safety for yourselves ; pray for it for your country ; and remember that it is a peace that can never be taken away from man, for it is “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”



IX.

THE SPIRITUALITY AND SIMPLICITY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

“The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.”—ST. JOHN IV. 23.

IF we compare the worship of God under the New Testament economy, with the worship of God under the Old Testament economy ; and still more, if we compare the worship of the true God at the present day with the worship of false gods in heathen lands, and if we judge after the sense and not after the Spirit, if we form a carnal judgment, the worship of God amongst the heathen—the worship of what they esteem to be God—is far more impressive, and far more imposing, than the simple worship of our solemn assemblies ; and as contrasted with the grandeur, and ceremony, and pomp, and sensuous accompaniments of the Old Testament worship, the New Testament worship is plain, and simple, and unimposing. When we remember that external symbol and impression very largely act upon a man, and that what appeals to his eye or his ear has greater power upon him than what simply appeals to his understanding, and to his inward affections ; when we consider how prone men are to be affected by music, by architecture, and things external and visible, it must seem a little strange and startling that the loftiest style of worship the great God has instituted for His creatures upon earth, whom He has redeemed and

called back into fellowship and friendship with Himself, should be so denuded, and so divested of very much that is fitted to affect the emotions and gratify the senses; that He should have confined the ordinances of the true worshipper to two very simple and natural ordinances—the effusion of water on the one hand, and the participation of bread and wine on the other hand—so simple and unimposing, that the man who looks upon the mere symbol and sign, might well stumble, and say, “What is there grand, and spiritual, and elevating there?”

And, indeed, it is very clear that naturally men *do* relish and despise simplicity of Christian worship; for almost ever since the apostolic days, a constant struggle has been going on more or less to carnalize the spiritual worship of Christianity, to embellish and enhance it, by bringing back either some of the ritualistic observances of the law, or grafting on it ceremonies, and sacraments, and accompaniments which have no sanction or authority in the New Testament scriptures. At the present day, the effort is showing itself very extensively indeed. Men are, to a large degree, dissatisfied with the plainness of ordinary worship according to the New Testament scriptures, and a mighty effort is going on, not only in the Church with which we are identified, but largely out of the Church, to render the worship of the sanctuary somewhat more imposing and impressive to the natural senses—to win, as they think, the world without the house of God, by making the house of God more attractive to worldly minds, by giving it a charm and fascination that shall win within its pale those who cannot be won by a sense of their solemn responsibility and duty towards God, and of the destiny before themselves. The extent to which this is going on cannot but have aroused and struck the mind; and the movement is becoming more and more strong and apparent. It is, there-

fore, a very seasonable subject to which I invite your attention this morning.

The Saviour was addressed by the Samaritan woman, who seemed to wish to turn off the conversation from herself, by bringing in some collateral subject: "Ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." He takes occasion to show that the dispensation of the gospel set aside the importance of certain localities; that it set aside externals which are not essential to the divine worship, and made the grand thing to be the spirit of the worshipper. "Woman," He said, "believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father," as exclusively, for "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" "for the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

The spirituality and simplicity of Christian worship constitutes its grandeur and glory.—This is the point upon which we invite you to dwell for a season. May God the Spirit be amongst us, that we may worship the worship that God requires—worship "in spirit and in truth;" and so worship Him here, that we may fail not in joining the glorious assembly hereafter.

The worship of the Christian economy is pre-eminently a worship that is not made to depend largely upon symbol, and sign, and external accompaniment; and just for the very reason, I conceive, that it is a more elevated style of worship than was enjoyed by the Jews; for the dispensation of the Jews was a dispensation that foreshowed and prophesied of good things to come; whereas, the dispensation of the Christian is to remind us, to put us in remembrance of good things already come to pass. Now, it is very clear,

that where you have a foreshadowing of a thing, you must have much more exactness and minuteness, than when you have simply to call the thing to mind. What a man already knows, but needs to be put in remembrance of, a very little thing will wake up the chord of memory ; but what is new to a man from the beginning, he must have carefully explained to him. If you want to remind a man of the United States who has travelled through those States, and is familiar with their scenes, a very little will recall his mind to the photographs in existence there ; but, if a man has never been there, you must bring to him pictures and maps, and give him careful explanations, in order to impart to his mind anything like a full and clear conception of the land. This illustration may serve to make it plain to you, how it is that we need less of figure, and form, and parable, and picture, and type, and sign and symbol, than the Jews of old did. They were in the infant school of the Church, and they needed to be taught by emblems, and pictures, and shadows, because they had to learn the first rudiments and elements of divine truth ; but we have come to the manhood of the Christian Church, we have arrived at the period of the Christian Church when the great events foreshadowed to the Jewish Church are realised and accomplished to us ; we have a full revelation and record of the great things that to them were yet to come ; we have the glorious facts of our faith familiar to our minds, and if it be not our own faults, impressed upon our hearts,—and we, therefore, do not need scenic representation and symbolic acting to shadow forth these things to us. We need to be reminded of them ; but I hesitate not to say, that the more simple the memorial, the more active its effect upon the spiritual life ; and in the simple feast of consecrated bread and wine, and the simple effusion of the young disciple with water, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,”

there is enough to touch the chord of deep devotion, and awaken the spirit of faith in the devout worshipper, in those who are not dependent upon their senses, upon mere impression. That is at the best but of a mixed and animal character ; but if the heart is strung and attuned to heavenly worship, the least breath passing over the chords, awakes them to heavenly melody. It is, therefore, especially the privilege of the Christian Church to render her worship of so much less elaborate, and artificial, and sensuous a character.

The worship of old, that was of a more artificial and impressive a character—impressive to the senses—was very largely defeated by the very tendencies of man. You will find, throughout the writings of the prophets, that, with the symbolic worship the people were constantly being entangled, drawing near to God with their lips, while the heart was far from Him. They rested on the symbol, and forgot that which it symbolised ; their natural emotions were wrought upon, but their spiritual devotions were dead. I need not quote the multitude of passages that prove this charge against them ; and certainly, when we consider how much easier it is to be moved by music than to have the heart elevated by praise, and thanksgiving, and communion with God—how much easier it is to take part in stated provision, and act a certain part in the conduct of a public assembly, and for a man to work upon himself a kind of animal excitement, than it is for a man to retire into the deep recesses of his own soul, and meet his Father in spirit and truth, and hold fellowship and communion with Christ in his heart, feeding upon Him “by faith with thanksgiving,” how much easier, and to him much more natural, to rest in the letter, than to rest in the spirit—to be satisfied with the form, without aspiring to the fidelity of godliness—it is no marvel that those of old should have defeated the purpose of God

in the emblems of His infinite skill, and that, instead of leading them to the manhood of the Church, they kept them in a state of pupilage and boyhood. They were occupied with forms and ceremonies, and did not see in them as in a glass, the reflection from afar off of the good things we possess; they had the husk without the kernel, the shadow without the substance, the temple without God. And surely the more we study all the manifold forms and ceremonies of Judaism, that proved a trap and stumbling-block to them of old, the more we may bless God that we see the things priests and prophets of old desired to see, and never saw. Instead of our simple worship losing anything in the contrast, it rises up to the loftiest sublimity, because it *is* a spiritual worship.

Then the religion of the Old Testament economy was a kind of stereotyped, severe, and uniform system. We do not allow our children, when young, the liberty of action we allow them when they grow up. Some say, the power of the understanding and the mind of the child is soon developed. I grant it; but not in the way of judging for itself. It has to be directed by the father's judgment, and the mother's wisdom, when a little child; but when it grows up to adult age, you must exercise the mind and understanding of the child—it must have more liberty of thought, and more self-regulating action of mind, otherwise you dwarf the mind. And even so in these early times: God prescribed everything strictly, and they had a mass of symbols and exact forms enforced by the most rigid discipline, and every departure therefrom was visited with punishment. It was a state of discipline; the child was at school, under masters and tutors, until the time of Christ came. When Christ came, the Church had come to a measure of manhood, then a certain liberty was granted, and the Church was not bound down to forms and ceremonies.

What God requires at the present day, is not that a man can only worship Him in Jerusalem or on Gerizim, not that he can only worship Him beneath the loftiest cathedral or amidst splendid architecture, but beneath the oak tree, in the little fisherman's bark, on the mountain side—anywhere, everywhere, if we worship Him “in spirit and in truth,” He draws near by the one Mediator and the Divine Comforter ; so that we are not tied and bound as the Jewish Church was. This is “the glorious liberty of the children of God ;” and, instead of sighing after the trappings and gilded chains of a spirit of bondage, we ought to bless God, and take heed lest we be entangled again in the yoke of bondage.

Then there is another point of view in which we have advantage and privilege in our simple worship. It brings before us the things of God in the light of God's truth and in dependence upon the power of God's Spirit. When men are acted upon by their senses, and carried away and ravished by things that appeal to their natural emotions, how apt are they to forget the end of all ! How apt is man, looking through the telescope at the distant stars with the object of bringing them to view, if his attention is distracted, and his mind is occupied with the beauty and ornamentation of the telescope, to defeat the object of the instrument, and to make the instrument the centre of attraction, instead of the objects it was intended to bring into view ! And just so, if in the worship of the sanctuary a cloud comes between the spiritual worshipper, and hides out God, instead of bringing Him always before him, and leaves him to be occupied with music, and ceremony, and forms, or anything that shades off the things of the great God, and heaven, and the Spirit, it becomes a stumbling-block and a snare, and what should be for our soul's health becomes an “occasion of falling.” If a man is ravished with music, and

fancies he is devoutly impressed in the presence of God, how apt are his emotions to deceive him ! How apt we are to substitute strong natural emotions for divine ! I remember being told of a man who was of a passionately musical taste saying that he never expected to be so near heaven as when, in York Minster, he heard Catalini sing Luther's Hymn. The voice of the singer, he said, plunged him on his knees, he grasped his hands, and remained in an agony of awe and devotion, till he was raised. My remark was, " If he never come nearer to heaven than this, I fear he will never reach heaven at all." Yet he was a very devotional man, though a man of strong natural emotion ; but how much was there indeed of the adoration of God, and a sense of His presence in that instance ; and how much of it was the ravishment of the senses, and the mere impression of sweet sound, and the power of the human voice, and the thrilling effect of certain tones and sounds ? Was this devotional ? was it godly ? was it the kindling of the Spirit of God, or, was it the natural emotion ?

We need to be on the watch, lest we be entangled and snared, instead of elevated. Be assured of it, the absence of too much form and ceremony, and impressive symbol from the simple worship of the Christian sanctuary, deeply advantages the Christian worshipper. If a man comes to be amused and interested, to have his senses wrought upon, if he comes for gratification, and from emotions that would lead him to the concert or the oratorio, then the church may want this charm for him, for he comes to worship neither " in spirit " nor " in truth," and such the Father seeketh to worship Him.

Let everything be done after the two apostolic canons, " decently and in order ;" and above all, " unto edifying." If men are edified, well ; if they are not, they are building up a self-delusion, and they will find, at last, that their vain

notions and emotions were but meteors of the marsh, that will go out in darkness, instead of still "shining more and more unto the perfect day." Then, dear brethren, let us have simplicity with beauty, tastefulness with propriety of worship. And certainly our beloved Church, taken according to her own beautiful Ritual, is as distinguished for her good taste as for her simplicity, if left alone in her own simplicity, eschewing enthusiasm on the one hand, and formalism on the other.

The subject is so full that we might dwell upon it largely. We have put you in a train of thought, and you will see that it is a matter not merely of general, but of individual interest to you. See, then, that when you worship in your closets, or in the great congregation, you come, seeking the Spirit of God ; for how can we worship Him in spirit and in truth, but as the Spirit enables us? The Spirit will help the infirmities of all who trust in Him through Christ, and will make "intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered;" and as our Church so beautifully expresses it in one of her prayers, God "will not despise the sighings of a contrite heart, nor the desires of such as be sorrowful."





X.

ABIDING SATISFACTION.

AN ANNUAL ADDRESS TO THE YOUNG.

“O satisfy us early with Thy mercy ; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”—PSALM xc. 14.

THERE is a touching affection between extreme old age and very early youth. The simplicity of the old man brings him into fellowship with the simpleness of a child. There is, perhaps, no group with which the painter adorns his canvas that is more pathetic, or more deeply interesting, than the group which brings the hoary head and the golden locks near to each other. There is a contrast, yet a communion ; there is a wonderful harmony, while there is a striking opposite ; and it generally happens that the good old man loves the little child, and the child is attracted to the good old man. Hence it is, that you often find old age seeking its solace in the artlessness and hilarity of a little child ; and hence you find the little child often shrinks from other strangers, while it is drawn by a secret attraction towards the hoary head, that is “a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness.” There must have been much of this spirit in the man of God, a man who had been brought into intimate communion with God ; a man whom God had styled His friend ; with whom He had spoken mouth to mouth ; whom He had raised up as a mighty leader to bring forth His

chosen people, to guide them through the desert, and to work mighty signs and miracles in their sight. He had been sorely burdened and worn out with all he had endured in leading and guiding an impracticable and perverse people, ever rebelling, ever discontented, ever disappointed; and he must indeed have felt, as he records in this grand psalm, that seems to be a kind of winding-up of his whole life—he must have found and felt how vain and disappointing, and empty, were all that man had to do with, all that befell him in his chequered pilgrimage; and under a deep sense of the vanity of everything earthly he had hoped for and sought for in man, he seems to have turned to the young, and to have felt specially for them, that they might escape the vanity and vexation of spirit that characterises the earth, and find the only solid resting-place and sure portion that can ever be enjoyed in this poor scene of vanity and folly. And therefore he seems to kneel down and place himself among the little children, and he seems to stretch forth his hands to God, and to make himself as one of them, and to pray as they would pray, “O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”

On the vestibule of a new year*—a holy vestibule—a Sabbath vestibule, may it be prophetic of the course of the year to each of us,—I have been accustomed on these occasions to address myself more especially to those yet in their early days, and to them I turn more especially this evening. Can I offer for them, can I ask them to offer for themselves, can I teach them to plead earnestly any supplication more touching, and beautiful, and appropriate, than the prayer of the man of God?

It places before us *that which alone can satisfy the soul*:—it teaches us *when that satisfaction ought to be sought*:—and it teaches us *the blessed results of that satisfaction, if sought and*

* January 1, 1865.

found: "We will rejoice, and be glad all our days." May God by His Spirit incline and draw the hearts of the young "with cords of a man and with bands of love," to bind themselves to Christ, and to bind themselves for ever!

God intends us to be happy; it was the intention with which He made us. We cannot conceive any other reason why He should make us, save for His own glory and our happiness. Can we form any idea of man in paradise that does not include his happiness? Can we suppose a being compassed about with all that sense could desire, all that life could furnish in an individual who was radiant with the image of his Maker, and had the moral similitude of God shining upon his soul,—can we suppose that such an one was otherwise than fully happy? The thought cannot enter into the minds of the most malicious and ignorant of men, that God could have made a being thus, and not intended him to be fully happy. Why is it that the whole race was not propagated to be a happy race? Why? We can only say, because sin marred the blessed work and purpose of God. And if any man ask why should this have been? we can only answer, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." It is in vain to try and fathom the fathomless, or to search the unsearchable. Men may object, they may dash their heads against their lot; but after all, the facts are there—startling, fearful, and incontrovertible facts. We *are* a fallen race, and what is the consequence of this fall? That man has lost a portion of his immortal spirit. We were made originally in the image, we were made for the glory, we were made for the service, we were made for the fruition of the Infinite; and so made, fallen as we are, we cannot find rest or peace anywhere but where God intended we should—in His favour, and service, and enjoyment. If we seek it there, we may still find it; and if we seek it not there, we never shall find it; but "the wicked," who will

not have God for their portion, "are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

Here are the characteristics of man—unsatisfactoriness, unsatisfiedness; seeking, and not finding; craving, and not having; hoping, and not realising; pursuing, and never fully attaining. The whole world is not at rest—satisfaction is not found. The word satisfaction beautifully expresses what the Spirit of God intended to convey. It means full enjoyment—enjoyment such as when one has enough, when all the capacities are filled, all the powers are flooded, as it were, in consolation and joy, so that a man is full. "I have all, and abound;" then a man is satisfied, and does not want more. But do you find this? do you find the men of the world satisfied if they get all they want? When they have got all they hoped for and dreamed of, are they nearer satisfaction and rest? I trow not! The universal testimony of man is, that it is "vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Again, many think that they are getting happiness when they are on the road to it; but when they are getting at what they believed was their journey's end, they find they are as far from it as ever. Are the young satisfied? They are hoping to be, they are expecting to be, they are looking to be; but *are* they? Are the middle-aged satisfied amid the bustle, and disappointments, and vanities of all their business pursuits? Are the aged satisfied and contented with what *they* have got? Oftentimes they are willing to leave the world, more from dissatisfaction than from satisfaction, more because they are weary than because they are satisfied. "My people," says God, "have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." No marvel, then, that they are dissatisfied, that they are unsatisfied. No doubt there are passages of life when a man thinks that he has got what

he wanted ; when he is more joyful, when he is more full of animal spirits, when he has all his fancy painted, all that life had promised, all that he had dreamed, and when the tide flows with him, and the sunshine hangs around him, and favouring breezes fill his sails, and all goes cheerfully and brightly,—then he may fancy he is happy. But he is not satisfied ; he feels that still he is on a changing ocean, and that all is uncertainty before him. There is something in all earthly enjoyment that palls upon a man. He is made with such boundless desires, and such expanding and elastic capacities, that no sooner does he get that which he looked for, than he gets weary of it, and he desires a change. Oh, it is all vanity ! There have been men who, when they have lived and tried all that earth could furnish for enjoyment, have actually taken the poisoned bowl, or the pistol, in hand, to get rid of weariness. Are *these* men satisfied ? They are gluttoned, they are surfeited, but they are never satisfied. And you may be assured of it, my young friends, though, perhaps, it may appear to the young that the old give gloomy pictures of life because they are going to leave it,—be assured of this, that we have tried it, and you have not ; we have tasted, and you have not ; we have travelled the road, and you have it yet to travel ; ours is the reality, and yours is but a day-dream ; you have it all in the future, while we have it all in the past ; therefore, you must admit that we know, and must know, as you cannot know—for we know both sides—we know what the earth can give at the best, and many of us, thank God, know what heaven can give, and we know the contrast. Be assured of it, therefore, that these vain hopes and dreams of yours,—that these affections you are gaining, the happy lots you think you are securing, the sweet connexions into which you are entering, the successes in the business of life you think you are achieving, the

cherishing of vain hopes, the number of pleasant prospects that are conjured up around you, are, after all, little better than a mere diorama passing before your eyes and fading away—a mere picture, an illusion, a mirage of the desert, and have no reality. Far be it from us to say that there is nothing on earth to enjoy, that there are no comforts worth living for. Life may be pictured too dark, or it may be too light; but, at best, it is but a shadow, a scene of lights and shades, coming and going, which are ever changing, having no abiding rest and satisfaction. And you must not look for it here. Indeed, if you do look for it here, and no higher, and nowhere else, you may be assured of it, that sooner or later you will come to the feeling of the wise man—“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

And there is a reason for this. We cannot be satisfied in any other way than as God will have, or intended, us to be satisfied. And how is that? In the enjoyment of Himself, in doing His will, in living to His glory, in hoping for “His favour which is life,” and “His loving-kindness” which is “better than life.” If this is found, we may find rest again. And we need not deplore our immortality with our high capacities, and yet our miserable shipwreck; for it is not the will of our Father that we should be left in this ruined state. He sent into this world His own Son: He sent Him “who was the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person,”—who was “the Word,” who was “made flesh,”—who was in the beginning, who was with God, and was God; who took our flesh upon Him, as we had it in the epistle this morning, “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” That blessed messenger has come for this very end, to give us rest and peace again, to fill our thirsty souls with the water of life, to enrich our deathless spirits with the bread of im-

mortality, and to reveal God to us as accessible again—to tell us how favour may be recovered, how His image may be restored that we lost in Adam, and to set before us for ever the atonement of Christ. What says He? “He that drinketh of this water”—He had represented the pleasures, and comforts, and the fruition of life, as water—“shall thirst again;” here the sense of craving will again return; “but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Yes, there is satisfaction; Christ in us, the hope of glory; Christ on us, the robes of righteousness; Christ with us, the companion of God; the love of Christ before us, the leader and shepherd that provides us and gives us green pastures and still waters, and supplies all our wants. These are but foretastes of that glorious land He hath prepared for them that love Him. How much He gives for present enjoyment and happiness, and how much more in future, in the prospect of eternal fruition. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” even in this life; and how much more in the life to come? Who can tell what is the destiny of the restored and renewed man, or what will be the satisfaction when that is accomplished which the Psalmist so longed for,—“I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness,”—the likeness of God complete again in the soul, filling the child of God with present comfort, or enfolding that child in light and glory—that child raised up higher than man was before he fell, not only to be equal with the angels, but almost higher than the angels—that child surely has “fulness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore.” Beautiful expression, “*fulness of joy*,” how it echoes the expression “satisfaction!” Surely it must be satisfaction.

Then, brethren, it is clear that the first and main object of life should be to get that mercy that alone can satisfy. All flows from mercy ; merit is nothing ; man has no plea to bring to God but—

“ Mercy, O God, mercy I ask,
 This is the total sum ;
 Thy mercy, Lord, is all I crave,
 Oh let Thy mercy come.”

Mercy flowing through the mediation of the Lord our righteousness, embracing justice and kissing peace is the one hope of man.

And that blessed mercy cannot be sought too soon. We need it from our mother's womb. We are shapen in sin, and conceived in iniquity. “ We are children of wrath, even as others,” as our catechism says. Then we need to be made children of grace and mercy. We need the mercy of God from the first dawn of reason ; and happy are they who have the first dawn of the Sun of Righteousness shining in their young souls. In some it does ; may it, my dear young brethren, in you, and may you, in coming to renew your covenant with God, come to be satisfied. Oh, to seek it early ! how much easier it is, how much more reasonable and according to the order of things, than to neglect it. For a man to seek that last which he ought to seek first, for a man to look for mercy when he has had his fill of sin, and has destroyed himself, is a waste of precious opportunities. What a miserable bankruptcy it generally turns out ! what wretched ingratitude it is ! Surely the great business of man cannot be too soon begun ; and until a man finds the mercy of God, he cannot and he ought not to be satisfied. “ Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things” necessary “ shall be added unto you.” Remember, justice stands at the door ; and when once that door is shut, mercy is gone, and despair is

begun, and hope never comes, for it never comes at all in that world of blackness and darkness for ever. Oh, my young friends, surely then your prayer should be, "O satisfy me early with Thy mercy." Let not the frivolities, and the levities, and the foolishnesses, and the delusions, and the day-dreams of life, cheat you of the one great thing. Seek mercy first of all, and above all, and forsake all that would hinder you from finding it; part with everything rather than come short of it. "Count all things but dung," that you attain the mercy of God; begin life from the proper starting-point; set out upon the race, starting from mercy, and grasp the prize with mercy alone for your object; as it is beautifully said, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life;" and to the end let it be mercy still.

Be assured of it, my young friends, you will find the longer you put off seeking it, the harder it will be to seek it and to find it; not that it has failed, not that it is yet out of your reach, but that you become more and more indisposed for it, you get more and more perverted and disturbed, and bound down to the world. Seek, therefore, the mercy of God in that early day in which God so loves you to seek Him; for He says, "They that seek me early shall find me." There is no positive promise of that kind to the aged, to those who put off salvation. It is only said, "They that seek me *early* shall find me." Though there are eleventh-hour sinners that are saved, it is not to the old, but the young, that the promise is given; it is simply, "They that seek me *early* shall find me." Then, brethren, if to seek His mercy is the great thing, the way to be happy is to have it found early, and then "rejoice and be glad all your days." Then you will be able to say, "Come what will, I cannot be miserable; take away all other hopes, that hope you cannot take away; darken all other prospects, that you cannot overcast; rob me of all other treasures, that no thief can break through or steal, 'no moth or rust can corrupt.'" "

And surely, my dear young friends, this is the secret of abiding happiness and satisfaction, to have the soul saved, to have salvation safe. "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy." Do not believe that you are going to bid farewell to all enjoyment, that you are going to choose a gloomy service when you choose the service of Christ. What! does He not wish to make you happy? did He not make man first happy? has He not come again to make us happy? The very design of the gospel is to restore the human race to happiness and glory and immortality; and surely, having realized this mercy, and found yourself forgiven, and quite at peace with God, you can say without presumption, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." Have your mind stayed on Him, and thus you shall be kept in perfect peace, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," and that peace shall keep you from all the perils of the world, from all the entanglements and the snares that beset you, from all the assaults of the devil, from all the delusions and defilements of a world lying in wickedness, and shall keep you safe. Is not this the faith of blessedness? for then, "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall the fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Be happy, then; it is your duty as it is your privilege. If you are not happy, you are not yet restored through the mercy of God in Christ; you have not yet begun to feel His yoke an easy one, and His burden a light one; you have not begun to be constrained by His love, because "we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead," and that He died and rose again, that we should live.

Can I then, my dear young brethren, give you a watch-

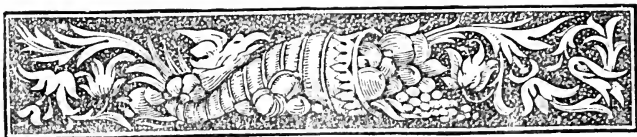
word for the year, a prayer to offer up day by day—a prayer your friends and your country and your Church ought to offer for you—more appropriate and beautiful and full than the prayer of Moses, the man of God, “O satisfy us early with Thy mercy ; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days?”

Many have passed these early days, and have not found mercy. If they have not found it, it is because they have not sought it as they ought ; and if they have not sought it and found it, have they found satisfaction ? are they satisfied with what they have got ? are they satisfied with the circumstances that surround them ? are they satisfied with their state of mind in the prospect of old age, and death, and judgment ? Let their own consciences answer, let their own hearts tell ! Then, my brethren, have you not made a mistake ? have you not set out upon the voyage of life without a chart, without a compass, without a helmsman, and without a port ? are you not tossing up and down, to and fro, the sport of the winds, the victim of the waves ? And can you expect to be satisfied in such a state ? Begin again. “Better late than never.” Seek the mercy of God while yet it is shining ; seek it, that it may shine into your dark minds, and irradiate your hearts, and shed abroad that peace which the world cannot give. Seek it now ; the opening year invites you. You may have been almost cut down, but the blessed Mediator has pleaded, “Spare it another year, that I may dig about it, and dress it.” Do not defeat His gracious purpose by saying you will not come to Him. “How often would I have gathered you,” says the Saviour, “even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ?” No, brethren ; do not deal so cruelly with yourselves, do not deal so thanklessly with your Saviour, do not deal so presumptuously with your God !

And, Christian parents, seek by your prayers and endeavours, that your children may seek God early, as He would

have them seek Him. If, in their early days, they are planted in the soil of a renewed heart, they will be everlasting plants, that will yield a sweet fragrance along the wilderness of life, cheering and refreshing all by their influence. Seek God's mercy to-day; you are not sure you will have another day. Many a grave and stone around these walls tells us to "watch and be sober." Half mankind die before they reach the age of most of you; and what right have you to presume that your life will be longer? But if you have found that mercy, will death be a terror? would it then be sad to die early? No; early death would then be early heaven, and how happy that soul, who can tell? What can harm it? what can disturb it? is it not satisfied and at rest for ever? Dear brethren, it is, therefore, "by the mercies of God," we would beseech you, at the opening of the year, to "present yourselves," body, soul, and spirit, "a living sacrifice" to God, through Christ Jesus, "which is your reasonable service."





XI.

THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD.

“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.”—PSALM I. 21.

WOULD we understand anything aright of the ways or the words of God, we must continually bear in mind what He himself has solemnly said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” If we need to remember this in the mysteries of His truth, so we need to realize it in the mysteries of His providence. That some of His most blessed people should be some of the most afflicted in the world, and some of the most impenitent, and wicked, and blaspheming enemies of the Lord the most prosperous in the world, is indeed an illustration that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts not our thoughts. How different we should order it, and how differently very many are disposed sometimes to interpret His ways, because they forget how high they are above them, high as the heaven is above the earth, and they are ready to say the prosperous must be the favoured, and the afflicted must be the disliked of God. How different the representation of the Scriptures. “As many as I love,” says Jesus, “I rebuke and chasten;” while of the men of this world it is said, they have their portion in this world, “they have their reward”—they seek nothing higher, and they get nothing better. The words you

have just hearkened to give us a key, or solution to this mystery, and at the same time are fitted to lead men—those men who are abusing the patience of the Lord—to a better state of mind. The Psalmist is dwelling upon the conduct of wicked men, how they approved and consentedst with a thief, and partook with adulterers, and then he says, singling out an ungodly man, and shutting him up in his own individual convictions,—or rather God says, for He interposes with His own voice, “These things,” that I hate and abhor, “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.”

The forbearance of God:—the misconstruction of that forbearance by the ungodly:—the ultimate issue of such misconstruction, if it be still cherished.—Let us look to God that these important lessons may be brought home to the understandings and hearts of all that have ears to hear, and that they may hear.

“These things hast thou done, and I kept silence.” We cannot know much of the world, or see much of mankind, but we must stand astonished and aghast at the desperate wickedness to which men will run—some openly and some covertly, some in the depth of the heart, and some in their open lives. There are instances, indeed, of obduracy and persistency in iniquity, even in spite of sorrows, and troubles, and afflictions, perfectly amazing, so that we are ready to say—Can they have hearts similar to others? is it possible they can be men? surely they are something worse—something less than men. But, after all, this is not true; but the man who knows the truth, who knows the plague of his heart, will rather say, “By grace I am made to differ; for if it had not been for God’s restraining grace and transforming power, I see an example of what I should have been.” After all, whence come these profanations, these

iniquities, these outrages upon God? From within ; for out of the heart proceed drunkenness, fornications, lusts, thefts, adulteries, uncleanness, ambition, pride, rebellion, and atheism ; they all spring out of the heart. As that heart is, it comes into the world, and man, "like a wild ass's colt," goes astray if left to himself. After all, the difference is in the development. Man will very often fall into temptation and neglect of God—and no doubt, this will be taken into account in the final judgment—nevertheless the man who practises sin against God with a high hand ought to bear in mind that he must not argue that God is indifferent. It is true God keeps silence. We might expect as soon as the sin is committed, as soon as the lie has passed the lips, or while it is trembling on the tongue, the lightning flash of God would strike him down dead, or when the false oath is uttered, that God would make His thunderbolt strike the wretch to the dust ! we would imagine that no sooner would the sin be committed than the punishment would follow, as the thunder follows the flash of lightning, but this is not so. This is a mysterious world, where mercy rejoiceth against judgment. Mercy is still offered, for God is long-suffering towards sinners, and is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." It is indeed marvellous the extent of the patience of God ! How oftentimes very good men—moral men—get out of patience when they see such robbery, such deceit, such brutal excess, such beastly sensuality ; men glorying in their shame, and revelling in all that is abominable and disgusting to human nature, delighting in iniquity for its own sake, taking pleasure in those that are bad themselves, trying to make men worse, and to keep them from becoming better, so that they no sooner try to escape from wickedness, than bad men set up as the devil's auxiliaries to drag them back, and make them ten-fold more the children of

hell than they were ; and oftentimes God's children are distressed at this, and are ready to say with the prophet, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night!" or, with the psalmist, "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law." Sometimes, too, they are ready to say, "How long, O Lord?" as the souls from beneath the altar are represented as crying. Then if they are tempted to impatience, what must God be? what must He see? We get but a little glimpse, a mere glance, into the depth of the gulf of abomination; but God hears and discerns all that is in the heart, all that comes out of the mouth, that as an open sepulchre often sends up its filthiness-like steam towards heaven. It is sometimes overwhelming to think what God must see, and hear, and know, and witness, and yet, "I kept silence," He says. Yes; there is no sound of a trumpet yet summoning to judgment; there is no destroying angel whose wings are heard coming to smite down the blasphemer and the infidel, who have gone so far as to challenge the Omnipotent to manifest Himself. Oh! the long-suffering and forbearance of God, that He takes them not at their word! "He is not a man," and therefore His are not the ways of man. "I kept silence." What is the lesson that that silence teaches? Oh! it ought to be to the man who is sinning with a high hand against God more touching and more powerful than the voice from the thick darkness that shrouds the throne of the Almighty God. With what power and pathos should it arrest the conscience, if it is not altogether seared; but "I kept silence." Oh! the power of the silence of the omnipotent and infinite God, who could in a moment smite to ruins, to atoms, to annihilation, the universe He has called into being, and yet poor, wicked, foolish worms dare to dash themselves "upon the thick bosses of his buckler," and to rush on in

sin and iniquity as a war-horse rushes into battle. "They know not the day of their visitation." "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib," and yet men, who bear the name of Christ, "know not, neither do they consider." Ah, dear brethren, it is a melancholy reflection, how dark, how fearful the history of the world, and yet the patience of God in the face of it all, in spite of it all! Now and then a fearful judgment, a momentous flash, leads us to look into the dread future, and shows us that there is a Judge: "Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth;" shows us that He has not forgotten to be just any more than gracious, that He has not altered His word one jot or one tittle, and that it cannot fail from what He has said, whether in the sternness of His threatenings, or the graciousness of His promises. "If we deny Him," "He cannot deny Himself." Whether we believe or not, it does not in the remotest degree affect the truth; there it stands written:—"Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." These words of God, whether the menaces to His enemies, or the promises to His friends, cannot pass away; and therefore, brethren, what a melancholy picture it is to see how the ungodly do largely and frequently abuse this silence of God! "I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee." That is a fine sentiment of a pagan writer in one of the classics, who says that man will be like the object he adores, that a man will make that which he adores like himself, and then he becomes more like him. And so you find it with bad, wicked men and the gods they worship—"they that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." It is a law of our being that what we adore we resemble, and that which we make to adore we make after the semblance of ourselves.

When a man sees God to be thus disregardful, as he suspects, we find that a kind of dread terror comes over him when he first ventures upon participation in the forbidden fruit ; he tries to stifle the voice of God within him, and to quench that fear which is trembling in his breast ; he fancies God does not care, and that though men talk about hell and judgment and such things, he fancies it will not be so ; he fancies God is "such an one as himself," that he is indifferent, and takes no notice. "Tush !" say the ungodly ; "the Lord shall not see." "O ye fools, when will ye understand ? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear ? or He that made the eye shall He not see ?" "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall He not punish ?" How strange that men should make a god of themselves, thus, as it were, undeifying the Deity, and robbing Him of all His infinite perfections. They act as though he will never do what He has said, and they seem to be even doubtful if He ever has said it ; "or," say they, "He would show some evidence of it ;" but He "keeps silence." Ah, they make God often according to their own desires, "such an one" as themselves, more distorted or deformed than one of those horrible monsters the heathen form and worship as their imaginary god. What kind of god think you does the brutal drunkard make to himself ? what kind of a god does the sensual and adulterous man make ? what kind of a god does the impure man make ? what kind of a God does the covetous man form who worships his shining dust, and loves it as the one object of his life,—what kind of a god does *he* make for himself ? "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Ah, poor sinner, "despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering ; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance ? whereas thou shouldest account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, for salvation is better than

riches. Oh remember, "if sentence were executed speedily" against the work of thy heart, it would not be so "set in thee to do evil;" remember also that "he, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Remember "God is not mocked," though man mocks Him in making God like himself, which is a fearful lie! "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting," "Thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself." Oh how man mocks himself, and belies himself, and befools himself, and yet "he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand?" Men sometimes marvel and are astonished, and will not believe the representations of travellers and missionaries, who tell us that men in heathen countries may be seen prostrating themselves in the deepest debasement, and in fearful sacrifices before the most loathsome and vile things, though these very men have minds, feelings, capacities, immortal, yet mortal. But, brethren, is it not equally a great marvel, that multitudes in this favoured land make a god to themselves as unlike God as it is possible to imagine? wanting in truth, wanting in justice, wanting in majesty, wanting in equity, wanting in holiness, wanting in immutability; so that, morally and essentially, he is just as distorted and unlike the Almighty as are the monsters, the blocks of wood and stone, before which the poor pagan mother slays her own child, or the idol beneath the wheels of whose car the poor infatuated victim lays down and is crushed to a mass. Ah! brethren, brethren, we judge very differently to God. He judges the heart. But "thou thoughtest," says the Lord, "that I was altogether such an one as thyself." And what will be the issue, what will be the result? "He that

believeth shall not make haste," and God does not make haste. It is beautifully said by Mrs. Hemans in her poem, "The Sceptic"—

"Patient becomes the Almighty."

And so Omnipotence is calm, and waits !

But the day is coming,—“God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world ;” and that day, that hour no one knoweth ; and yet there *is* the day, there *is* the hour, therefore God says—and this is the issue of such sad mis-construction, if persevered in—“I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.” Wonderfully sublime, and yet wonderfully simple ! Yes, brethren, God must reprove—that is, convict : I will convict thee. Sooner or later He will, and in doing so, He will do it by simply setting before the eyes of his enemies the things they have done. He will say to them, “Am I not bound to keep my law, to vindicate my truth ? Thou thoughtest I was such an one as thou thyself, but now thou seest what a lie it was. Out of thine own mouth I will judge thee.” And, brethren, there are three ways by which God will reprove and convict the ungodly, and set in order their doings before their eyes. In the first place,—God grant it may be so with any of you who may have been realizing the picture I have been endeavouring to draw !—He may reprove him, and set his deeds before him in His own light, as revealed in His own word, as seen in the person of His Son ; and happy is the man who in that light beholds his own darkness. Oh ! what an opening up it is to a man to see this, as Saul of Tarsus saw during his three days’ blindness, when he saw himself in some degree as God saw him, and was humbled and brought low, when God reprovèd him and brought his evil deeds before him—his presumption, his pride, his enmity to Jesus, all that he had done against His name—all these things God set in order before him. Oh ! there is but one

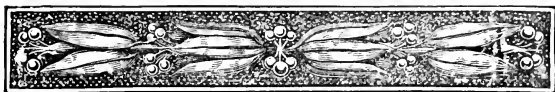
way in which iniquity may be hidden, and yet God be true and just and faithful, and that is as a poor deaf mute is represented to have shown in a simple way, when trained by the simple reading of the word to a knowledge of the truth, not through the hearing of the ear, but through the sight of the eye. When some one wrote upon the slate, "Are you a sinner?" she scored over the slate many times the word "sinner," signifying the multitude of the offences; and then the person wrote upon the slate, "How then must your sins be forgiven?" and she moistened her hand and passed it over all the scores, and wrote, "Jesus must thus pass His red hand over—He blots them all out for ever." Is it not so? If we refuse to see our sins, God sees them; but if we consent to see them, if we acknowledge and confess our faults, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;" "but whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper." O happy they who have their deeds reprov'd and set before their eyes, as they were set before the eyes of David, who said, "Thou hast set my secret sins before me." Again he said, "My sin is ever before me; thou hast blotted out my offences, and rememberest my iniquities no more." As you have it in the covenant of grace, as read in the word of God this evening:—"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Here, brethren, is the only way in which the ungodly man, who has provok'd God, and has long thought Him such an one as himself, may find mercy, and not by misrepresenting, not by misunderstanding, not by forgetting, not by saying things hard against God. How will he be able to stand against the Almighty? If a man falls low before his Maker, his Sovereign, and his Judge, and acknowledges himself as

a sinner, he proves that God will be merciful and a Saviour ; then God begins, as it were, no more to see his sins, because Jesus covers the transgression, and blots it out as a cloud, and as a thick cloud He casts the sins behind His back, and buries them in the depths of the sea : “ I will remember them no more.” But do not forget that God must and will reprove a man, as He is true, and set his deeds before him. Some He sets them before in darkness and despair. I have seen a few such cases, and they are terrible to witness, when a man awakes up to see the catalogue of his sins and he has no hope, but is given up to despair, and is abandoned by God ; then a man has a foretaste of “ the worm that never dieth.” What must it be to have them set before us when it is too late ? Oh ! what a dark panorama of eternity passes before the mind, when, in the lurid light of eternity, a man reads the dread catalogue ! “ Remember ! remember ! ” says God in the parable, by the lips of Abraham to the lost rich man who forgot his God, “ remember, son, remember ! ” What a fearful echo ! And that word sounds through all eternity ! God is true and cannot change ; He cannot lie, and He will reprove every bold and presumptuous transgressor who has thought God to be such an one as himself. Remember it, bear it in mind. You go and sin wilfully ; you go perhaps to-morrow night, and do something your conscience tells you is wrong, and you try to get rid of misgivings, but that does not alter the truth of God. No, brethren ; deal not so basely and cruelly with yourselves. Do bear in mind that these acts

“ God may forgive, His Spirit may renew,
But even His omnipotence cannot undo.”

What a man does wickedly against God is done ; though a Saviour’s atoning blood interposes to avert the just judgment, the deed is *done*, and pools of blood could not efface it. It is

said of some distinguished monarch, who was raised from the lowest position to be king on account of his power and greatness, that he retained in a little inner chamber of his palace the common clothes he was accustomed to work in when a labourer, and once a year, on the day of his accession to the throne, he used to shut himself in that room, and for some hours contemplate his garments in his days of lowliness, to teach himself humility, sobriety, and watchfulness. This was very wise, very beautiful, and very instructive ; and so should the child of God not forget the garments of his days of ignorance, but he should think of them, that he may bless God who has clothed him with a garment of righteousness, and has dressed him for His kingdom and glory. Therefore, remember the silence of God ; if you do not abuse it, bless it ; for it does not speak terror to you, but it speaks hope and enjoyment. And oh, do bless God that He has not let loose His wrath and displeasure against you, that though the door is shutting, it is not yet finally closed ; bless Him, that though the gulf is almost finished, it is not yet fixed ; that there is still the archway over which you may cross from the land of darkness, and despair, and condemnation, to the blessed country of grace, and mercy, and peace. Escape, then, for your lives ! Pray, if you are in weakness, or in sickness, or in sorrow, that it may not be the twilight that deepens into eternal night, “seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near,” then shall it be converted from the twilight that comes to midnight darkness and despair, into the light-dawn that brightens into the fulness of eternal day.



XII.

LOOK TO THE END : A CONTRAST.

“The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him : but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.”—PROVERBS x. 24.

ONE who was a heathen philosopher has left upon record as his wisest saying, “Look to the end ;” and God himself puts the question to us, “What will ye do in the end ?” and His heart’s desire and prayer, in His own blessed omnipotence and sovereign grace is, “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end !” We say, even in common proverb, and people apply it very often to things in this world, “All is well that ends well,” and nothing can be more true if it ends everlastingly well ; but nothing ends well that does not end thus well ; and many things that seem not to end well to us, will be proved at the last to have ended best of all. Disappointments, crosses, pains, bereavements, sicknesses, disease,—we shall see, if not in this life, certainly in another world, that these are not only amongst the things that end well, but are oftentimes amongst the chiefest that “work together for good to them that love God.”

The passage that you have listened to condenses into a very small compass the whole matter. It points us to the issue, the upshot, the end of two different classes of men—the wicked and the righteous ; it indicates as well as expresses *the end of the wicked* :—his hopes perish, his fears come upon him ; *the*

end of the righteous :—his fears are dispelled, his hopes are consummated and realized ; he has his desire, while the wicked has his fears. What a contrast ! How dark the black side of the cloud, and how bright the brilliant side of the cloud ! Which will be the side before us, brethren, in a little time when we find ourselves dying ? Surely that question is not a vain one, it is not an impertinent one, it is not one that does not concern us, but one that every man in his senses will do well to try to resolve. May God, then, be with us by His Spirit, that we may learn to be wise, to consider our latter end, whilst we view the twofold contrastive termination and consummation of the wicked and of the good.

The end of the wicked, that it may be fully contrasted, is the dark fulfilment of all his fears, and the end of all his hopes—their end, if they are bound by threescore years and ten. If he hoped for nothing beyond success, prosperity, long life, fortune, fame, distinction, position, rank, renown, pleasure, he has got them, and he hath his reward, he hath his portion, he hath what he sought, he hath what he desired, and now what has he left ? It is said with awful emphasis in the Book of Psalms, of the end of the ungodly, that “all their thoughts perish with them.” It does not matter at all, save as it tells on our present responsibility and future doom,—it does not matter at all whether a man is as poor, and diseased, and dependent as Lazarus, or as rich as Croesus, or as distinguished as Cæsar—not in the least. All his plans, all his desires, all his pleasures, all his pursuits, all his purposes, all his vain aspirations, perish like “a dream when one awaketh,” and what is left behind ? “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” if all ends there. Oh what a wreck it is ! oh what a ruin it is, when a man has nothing more for his anchor, when he has nothing within to hold by, when there is not so much as a small fragment by which to cling as he goes—and must go—out on the boundless ocean that is before him ! and often, too,

all his hopes come to an end, such as they were with reference to this world only. There are few men so ungodly, there are few so absolutely steeped in unbelief—they try, perhaps, to disbelieve, but they do not gain their end—there are few, indeed, who have any right understanding and acquaintance with Scripture, or have heard anything about the worth of the soul and salvation, but have their uneasinesses and misgivings. They *try* to make hope for themselves. Probably if you were to ask the poor drunkard, or the debauchee, or the covetous, or the malignant, what he looks for, what hope he has, he will tell you he hopes for heaven ; and if you were to ask him why he hopes for heaven, he would have some reason that he would assign, that perhaps deceives and befools himself, though it can hardly deceive and befool others who have any knowledge at all of the truth of God. He trusts in the uncovenanted mercies of God solargely, that he makes God unjust, by making Him good and merciful. He urges all that He has gathered and picked up in the intercourse of life, all that he has read in the lying and terrible books Satan propagates, to cheat a man into the falsehood that God will not be so fearfully strict for what a man cannot help—for his natural passions, and desires, and inclinations, if he indulges them ; and he thinks that in the vast and mighty multitude he may surely hope to hide and escape. Perhaps men may ground a false hope on something not acknowledged, on something that they have in reserve, on the notion that there will be something of purgatorial intervention to fit them for heaven ; they may think that, though the gulf is fixed, it may be passed ; that, though the door is barred, it may open to them ; and so there are millions who have this false hope in their hearts, but when they get into eternity, they will find that all their hopes are vanished ; As I live, saith the Lord God, “ every knee shall bow to me,” and every tongue shall confess to God ; confess that He is true, and just, and holy, while He is merciful ; confess that

He did not make men with false fears, or false hopes, when He bid them turn from their evil ways ; that He did not make them with false hopes, when He said, " Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to Him. " Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him," and abundantly pardon him. And they will find that their hopes cannot confront the " holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," for " God is not a man, that He should lie ; neither the son of man, that He should repent : hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken it, and shall He not make it good?" Does He not wind up the book that discloses the future, by telling us what we shall find in the world before us? and it is this fearful decision : Let the unjust be unjust still, let the filthy be filthy still, let the unholy be unholy still, let the righteous be righteous still, let the just be just still ; and does He not tell us beforehand, that if the wicked then come and knock, and say, " Lord, Lord, open unto us," He will answer, I never knew you ; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, to the worm that never dieth, and where the fire is not quenched? Will not, then, the hopes of the unrighteous man fail him? They will be as the bands on the arms of Samson, that burst as if they had been tow in the flame. It is an awful thing for a man to discover that he is leaving all his hopes behind him, and to find all his hopes that he placed before him to be " twice dead," withered, and " plucked up."

And then, brethren, the fearful contrast is, as all his hopes perish, his fears are realized and accomplished. How emphatically the wise man puts it, " The fear of the wicked, *it* shall come upon him." For a man has his fears—the boldest, the most hardened, the most sensual, the most unbelieving, the most reprobate, have their fears. It cannot be otherwise ; a man is not such a brute but he has some sense of immortality ;

a man is not such a stone, but he has some apprehension of that immortality, dreadfully as "the candle of the Lord" is darkened in our heart, awfully as Satan infatuates and blinds us if he has his own will. Men have their misgivings and their apprehensions, and then they comfort themselves by thinking that it is all foolish and vain fear. "I'll risk it," as some will dare to say. What! risk it! And what does the Bible say? "Even thereafter as a man feareth, so is Thy displeasure;" that is, man's utmost fear does not go beyond God's displeasure; he will find the everlasting displeasure of the Almighty more dark and dreadful than ever he imagined. If eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him, what shall we say He hath prepared for them that hate Him? And surely if a man hates God here, he will hate Him hereafter; surely if in the face of redeeming mercy, if in the face of gospel offers, he hates God, he cannot expect that he will cease to hate Him in everlasting torments, in the presence of the devil and his angels. What madness, then, for men to think that there may be repentance in hell! There *can* be no repentance from despair, for repentance needs hope. "Repent, and believe the gospel;" "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" that is the ground of repentance. Will there be such a voice ever heard in the dreary regions of utter darkness and hopeless despair? Will there ever be such a voice heard in the place where a drop of water was asked in vain to cool the burning tongue, in the place of torment where the flame can never be vanquished? No; for there is "a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass" it, "cannot." Surely, brethren, the highest fear that a man has can hardly come up to that fear, when it comes upon him; when it is no longer an apprehension, or an occasional shudder and misgiving, but it comes to be a startling, immutable, never-ending reality. God preserve us from

ever knowing what that fear is when it comes upon a man, as it will as God is true !

And as the darkness makes the light more bright, as the rainbow is the loveliest on the darkest cloud ; so is the beautiful reverse. The desire of the righteous shall be fulfilled,—the desire of the righteous shall be *granted*—more beautiful still than fulfilled ; fulfilled does not answer to unfold the source of the gift, but granted does unfold it. Not that the righteous have deserved it, does God grant it ; but it is all of mercy, all of grace. The grant is made freely, and without desert ; and so it is that the righteous have served God, and they have their reward granted : not because of their service, but it is granted of grace ; and consequently where He grants grace, He will grant glory as the legitimate consequence and issue.

Now, brethren, we reverse the picture, and take the two-fold contrast, as we took it in the case of the wicked.

The fears of the righteous shall all vanish, and with that the desires of the righteous shall be granted. Just the converse, just the antithesis. Blessed change ! Here, fears shall be dissipated. It is not to be supposed that though the righteous have hopes and desires, they have no fears and misgivings. In this poor world of lights and shadows, of ups and downs, of uncertainty and change, there will be fears for the righteous. They ought not to fear, it may be said. What we ought not to do, and what we really do, are very different. So long as a man is in the body, he must be more or less under the influence of the body, under the influence of the infirmities that belong to the body ; and, therefore, righteous men will have their fears, and even when they get further exercised in things spiritual and eternal, they have a class of fears that the wicked scarcely have. Many poor men fear that they may not be able to provide for their children. Many a man fears that he may die and leave a widow and orphans, and that at last he must come to the workhouse and want. And how

many have been the fears with regard to health and the breaking up of the physical powers ? Many of God's children are not above these fears ; they feel them—it is natural that they should. And then their greatest fears about which they dread most, are lest they should get into temptation and fall away, and dishonour their Lord and Master, and their Christian name—lest they should some time or other be overwhelmed and carried away, turned back and forsaken—and they feel themselves so foolish and afraid, and beset with temptation, that they have, as St. Paul says, “fighting without and fears within.” So it often comes to pass. And do they not sometimes fear very much the dark passage to the full light that they yet anticipate ? They fear, lest they should not be found to have been faithful and sincere, and upright ; they fear, because they have not so much assurance and confidence, and joy, as they find some about them enjoy ; they fear that, when it comes to the death-bed and the dark valley, they may be overwhelmed with dread ; they fear the struggle of the untying and unloosing of the bands that unite the tabernacle of earth to the deathless spirit ; they fear that, when they must leave this tabernacle, Satan may be let loose upon them and seize them ; they fear the king of terrors himself,—there is something awful about death. Ah, brethren, all these fears shall be dissipated ; for the reward of the Christian's fears in that they shall not come upon him, whilst the terror of the bad man's fears is that they *shall* come upon him. A man's fears shall not come upon him at the last, if he has a Saviour to shelter and shield him ; and his earthly fears shall not come upon him, for God is his Shepherd, and he “shall not want.” “Thy bread and thy water shall be given thee ;” and though he were to go to the workhouse, cannot God make a workhouse a palace, as He did the prison and the dungeon ? Did not Paul and Silas sing in their dungeon ? and cannot the Christian be happy in the workhouse ? Does he fear that

there will be no provision made for his widow and his children, what says God? "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive." Is your fear lest you may not have the means of supporting yourself, what do we read? "I have been young, and now am old; and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." And then, with regard to fears about death, and acceptance, and assurance, and sustaining power to meet the struggle of "the last enemy that shall be destroyed," which "is death;" with regard to the thick shades and the sound of the deep waters across which we must go,—what is the promise? All the fears of the righteous give way there too; and it is with those fears as it is with the shadows of the day. When a man walks in the morning the sun lies behind him, and throws his shadow before him, and it falling in the front of him somewhat dims and darkens his way; but as the evening comes on, when the sun declines in the west and comes nearer the horizon, he throws his light forward and aslant upon the pilgrim, and throws his shade behind him, and the full light is before him. So the fear of the righteous gets behind him more and more as he gets to the light of the setting sun;—yet not the setting sun, for though setting in nature, it will rise and brighten in glory. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." I have seen this very day one surrounded with all that wealth can give to make life last, and she is wearing and wasting in sickness, and is infallibly,—as far as man can judge,—within a few steps of that dark valley; yet all is bright, all is joy—all fears are gone, and hopes are all fulfilling. As she said, "You tell me of dying, where is it? how is it? it is life, it is life, death swallowed up in victory." Ah, brethren, fears, and sorrows, and sufferings, and temptations, and pains,—these belong to life and not to death. "To depart,

and to be with Christ," is best. There is rest, where "the wicked cease from troubling," and where "the weary" indeed "rest." All fears are left behind. What a blessed thing, as the wicked leave all their hopes, the righteous leave all their fears. Could anything be more contrastive? could anything be more assuring and joyful to the one, and more awful to the other?

Then, brethren, their desire shall be granted. What have they desired? If you could open their breast and inspect the thoughts and desires of the careless and unbelieving, what will you find at the best but vanity! They desire wealth, they desire admiration, they desire long life, they desire position, they desire dress, they desire folly, they desire anything, everything, but the one thing needful; and if you lay open the breast of the righteous, though, alas! you would find worldly desires, you would find them subdued and brought down, and you would find the chief desire is God's love in Christ, acceptance in Him, eternal life through Him. We have the breast of one of the holiest of men laid open before us in that beautiful experimental description of the mighty change in his heart as you listened to it this evening. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him." There are his desires; and though, brethren, there are few so single and supreme in their desires as was the holy Paul, yet to gain the same supremacy of desire must be the aim of every servant of God. Then listen to another desire. I trust many here can re-echo it. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee." The desire of the righteous shall be granted him—that is, the desire above all things,—salvation, Christ, heaven, the love of

God, the Spirit of God, the likeness of God. Listen to God's own promise. "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thy heart." Has God ever disappointed a man who trusted? did He ever fail to fulfil His promise to him who sincerely sought and followed after it? If a man has presumptuous desires instilled into his breast by Satan, doubtless he will be disappointed, for, as I showed, the false hopes of a man will fail him utterly; but the humble desires of a man, inspired by God from His promises, through His Son, by His Spirit, He cannot fail to fulfil. God cannot be unfaithful, for heaven and earth may pass away, but the desires of the righteous shall not fail of accomplishment—shall not pass away, shall not be disappointed and confounded. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death," and with hope in death, we may say, indeed, no hope beyond death, for all hopes will be absorbed in the fulness of fruition; and there will be no call or reason for hope, when all that God can give to His ransomed children, all that they can enjoy shall be poured upon them, and they shall "be filled," as it is said, "with all the fulness of God;" when, as Jesus himself says, He will "come forth to serve His people," which is an expression of infinite condescension, for it expresses the delight of the divine Redeemer in ministering to the solace, and enjoyment, and glory, and honour of His ransomed people. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Then, brethren, look at the contrast. Look at the picture on the dark side and on the bright side, and say, which is it you would wish to realize? All the hopes of the wicked shall perish, all the fears of the wicked shall be fulfilled; all the fears of the righteous shall be dissipated, all the desires of the righteous shall be granted. What was the desire of our blessed Redeemer? "That where I am, there those Thou hast given me may be also, that they may behold my glory which was before the

world began." Dear brethren, do not mistake it, and think, "Well, I am not perhaps as righteous as I wish to be, but I am not wicked; I am living a moral life, a decent life." That is not the question. What is your desire? what is your *chief* desire? what is the pole-star that guides you? are you steering for the haven where you would be? are you desiring something earthly, or is Christ supreme with you? Suppose you got your desire, would it be the thing Christ loves, would it be eternal life? You must have your desire; which shall it be, which is it? O, brethren, let us deal faithfully with ourselves. "What! know ye not your own selves?" The man who does not desire Christ as the supreme thing, will find himself placed among those who lose all their hopes, and realize all their fears. And, brethren, let us learn further not to be doubtful or unbelieving. What are we, if we have no faith, if we give ourselves up to endless misgivings? where shall we find rest? what is before us? what lamp shall light us when all life's glow-worms expire? The mightiest monarch, when he comes to that dread hour of nature's bitter agony, what has he if he has not the light of life to light him beyond? O brethren, "the light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out." Seek for the lamp of life, unfailing hope through Christ. Take care that it is no poor glow-worm of earth; for, if it is, it will go out. And further, brethren, if we have this heavenly light, let us bless God "with joy unspeakable and full of glory" for placing before us that desire; let us thirst after it more and more; let us seek to cherish the desire; thus shall we grow in assurance and confidence that our desire shall be fulfilled.



XIII.

ORDERING THE CONVERSATION ARIGHT.

“To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.”—PSALM I. part of 23.

WE are often exhorted to seek God. We are told we must seek Him while He is to be found. We are told that except we have Christ, we are lost ; that except we have faith in Christ, we have not Christ ; that except we attain to salvation, it were better for us if we had never been born, and that the dread alternative of this brief span is immortality of misery, or immortality of blessing. We are disposed to believe this, but we are at a loss how to believe it. Vague generalities do not avail a man ; when he is setting out on a difficult, and dangerous, and unknown path, he wants to have some chart to guide him, some map to describe his way. The mariner, who has to thread his pathway through difficult and perilous seas, needs to have such a chart as will mark down for him, not merely the perils he must avoid, but also the way he must steer. Such remarks and questions are, in effect, not unfrequently put—if not in words, in the mind—by hearers who are warned, and exhorted, and persuaded to seek salvation. They do not object to seek it, but they seek it at random. They do not set about anything ; but they wait until they are forced to be saved against their will, snatched as brands from the fire. Is there nothing that wants setting about ? Is there nothing that we ought to give our attention

to in order that it may tend to our salvation? These are inquiries we are quite warranted and justified in making. Though it is true that God sometimes arrests a man, as He did Saul of Tarsus, in the midst of his persecuting and mad career, such cases are exceptions, to show the sovereignty and mighty efficacy of the grace of God; and for a man, because there are such instances, to sit down in ignorance and presumption, and Antinomian confidence, argues a man given up to blindness; for, after all, practical effort must characterize sincere desire. If it does not follow that a man in earnest tries, we must question his earnestness; it is impulse, imagination, enthusiasm; it is not that practical godliness to which God promises the blessings of divine teaching and favour. The passage before us is exceedingly full, and clear, and precise upon this point, and very well indeed goes to show you that if the flax does but smoke, you have only to seek for it to burst into a flame. "To him," says God himself, "that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God."

The words obviously found these three points:—*A man does not order his conversation aright, unless he seeks for the salvation of God:—a man does not seek the salvation of God aright, unless he seeks to order his conversation aright:—the man that honestly and earnestly does both shall, sooner or later, have the salvation of God.*—May God by His Spirit give us a right judgment, and incline us to be "not only hearers but doers of the word," that we may be "blessed in the deed."

He cannot order his conversation aright, who does not seek and wait for the salvation of God.—By the salvation of God, we understand man's deliverance from sin and death and condemnation, through the great work of the atonement wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ. Till a man arrives at this, till he has built upon this rock, till he receives through Christ that blessed peace which we have, as the apostle

says, "with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ," a man ought not to feel quite comfortable, and happy, and satisfied in his mind. A man may be waiting for, though he may not yet have obtained; he may be seeking for, though as yet he fears to say, "I have found;" he may be looking out for the day, though he is not satisfied that the dawn has begun. To order a man's conversation aright, I understand to be, to so shape, and direct, and steer his course of life, if he is seeking salvation, as to tend to that point; to set it before him, and to make everything subservient to it. Even as the mariner sets the haven which he hopes to reach, before him, that he may steer towards it; and though he may deflect, or be deflected from his course by contrary winds or opposing currents, he is set true to one point, he turns his prow towards the haven, he sets his compass to the point to which he seeks to go, and the haven he wishes to reach; so a man, who orders his conversation aright, steers his way through all the changes and chances of life, through good report and evil report, through sorrow and joy, through prosperity and distress, that he may not come short of the salvation of God. Now, if a man does not keep that salvation in view, it is in vain for him if he does many good and right things. The man who orders his conversation, in order that he may make his peace with God, and do without a Saviour,—the man who orders his conversation, as he fancies, to commend himself to God, and to entitle him to God's favour,—the man who orders it with a view to wrap himself round in a fancied robe of self-wrought righteousness, who is lifted up by his own good deeds and attainments,—the man who orders it to stand well with his fellow-men, and to get a name, and a reputation for sanctity,—the man who orders it that he may, as he fancies, at least make amends for his misdeeds and blot out his transgressions, whether by fastings, or pilgrimages, or sacrifices,

or long prayers, or meritorious self-inflicted sufferings ;—by whatsoever of these means he fancies he can reconcile himself to God, and restore himself to his Father, and make to himself a Saviour, he does not order his conversation aright ; for everywhere in the Word of God, if we receive its testimony in its simplicity, we are taught, “ other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” “ There is none other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus.” “ He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth in him.” With such declarations, as clear as the light before us, must not that man be far from ordering his conversation aright who orders it, not with a view to a Saviour, and with a hope of finding salvation in Him, but in the vain belief that Christ is not needful, and that man might find mercy without coming to the cross, that man could by any ablutions or tears wipe away the guilt of his soul, that man might without divine support have the power to purify himself, and rectify himself, and regulate his own soul and make it “ meet for the inheritance of the saints.” Must not a man be on the wrong tack if he is steering thus far and wide on the open sea without a haven before him, or not steering to the right haven if he is steering, but steering to some earthly haven, and not to that blessed place “ within the veil ” towards which his prow should ever be turned ? Surely it is very clear that a man who is travelling will never reach the right end unless he keeps the right end in view ; therefore, brethren, let it not be forgotten that it is not a right conversation that has not God through Jesus Christ in order to it, as the pathway to it, and that pathway the prelude to grace. Then, brethren, take it for granted that God has clearly laid down,—implied and involved at least,—that except a man orders his conversation

aright with a view to salvation, he cannot be said to have ordered it agreeably to the will and purpose of God. There are very many earnest, and sincere, and honest men who so order their conversation that they are most exemplary, and are almost a reproof to some who do enjoy the salvation of God; yet, after all, having steered amiss and come short of the blessed haven, they find themselves engulfed in the dread whirlpool that will swallow up all who have not Christ for a refuge. Nothing else will avail a man but that blessed life-boat; that alone shall float a man safely through the strait of death, and land him safe on the shore of eternal tranquillity.

The man does not seek the salvation of God aright, who does not seek it in ordering his conversation aright. For, after all, the language of Scripture on this point is as clear as on the former: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." "Then shall we seek for him, and find him when we search for him." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." His going forth is declared as the morning, he shall come to us as the former and the latter rain; "for," said Jesus, to those who were beginning to shape their conversation aright, "if ye continue in my word, ye shall be my disciples indeed." "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Do not such passages as these just as explicitly declare that we must order our conversation aright, in order to enjoy fully the salvation of God, as, that till we have found that salvation, we come short of the great object and end the poor penitent sinner must follow after till he obtains; ay, and that even the feeble believer must follow after, till he has some blessed apprehension of it, that he may not die in conjecture or possibility, but in a blessed certainty and hope in Christ Jesus the Lord. He no longer will then say it is preaching self-righteousness to tell a man

to turn his back on the world, and to turn his face towards the narrow road to heaven. Surely no man will say it is building up a false hope to bid a man seek for Christ in the way of humiliation, and confession, and prayer, and searching of heart, and attending upon the ordinances of God, and so continuing patiently all his life to the last hour, seeking the salvation of God; not resting in what he himself has done, or is doing, but still looking to the goal of the "mark of the hope of the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus," that he may "give all diligence" till he can make his "calling and election sure." Yet, brethren, I am persuaded that many are resting in unconscious Antinomianism, many are abusing the long-suffering and the grace of God, and are living in self-indifference, and stagnation, and sluggishness, and selfishness, and worldliness, that will never bring peace to a man. A man who sets about it earnestly, doing the will of God as far as he sees it does not rest in that; he still looks to Christ, he still looks for God's quickening Spirit to give life to his obedience, and that man is ordering his conversation aright.

Be assured of it, brethren,—though I grant that all this may be, and a man may yet, perhaps, be left in much darkness and doubt,—the Word of God warrants us, and the experience of God's children in all ages warrants us, in saying that as He has not said "Seek ye me" in vain, so *no man that seeks honestly to order his conversation aright, shall fail to have shown to him, sooner or later, the salvation of God.* The man who thus waits for and seeks the salvation of God, nothing short of it satisfying his soul, shall not fail to find what he is seeking for. God who is true, has said, "To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God," therefore, it will, and it shall follow; for "let God be true, and every man a liar." Surely, this of itself ought to suffice; but there are promises and examples abun-

dant in His own word to cheer us onward, however long the pathway may seem. How beautifully this is illustrated in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch ! He had responsibility, wealth, power, possessions ; yet he ordered his conversation in order to have and find manifested to him the salvation of God. How he left power and empire, and travelled the wilderness solitary and alone, in order that he might go up to Jerusalem, where he had heard there were tidings of the Saviour ; how, as his mind was still on the subject, as he sat in his chariot, and was reading in the prophecy of Esaias, most anxious to be taught, a stranger came up, and hearing him read the prophet, asked him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" and he said, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" And Philip turned his eyes on the place which he read. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth : in his humiliation his judgment was taken away ; and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth." "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." And God showed him his salvation ; he believed it, and enjoyed it. And he said, "See here is water ; what doth hinder me to be baptized ? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." And he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And both went down into the water, and Philip baptized the eunuch, and the Spirit of God caught him away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. He ordered his conversation aright, and God showed him his salvation ; and that salvation filled him with joy, and thanksgiving and praise. Take another, and still more beautiful example. There was a proselyte in Rome, a Roman and centurion, a man in high post in the army ; he had heard of Jesus and the promised salvation of God, that salvation of which Jacob said, "I

waited for Thy salvation," and he was constant, according to the light that he had, in waiting upon God for His salvation, when an angel appeared to him, and said, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter," he "shall tell thee words whereby thou mayest be saved." The man was ordering his conversation aright. He had not the full salvation, he had not the things whereby he might be saved, and he was told them in a vision, the angel's voice accompanying. And as Peter was preaching to the people, the Holy Ghost fell on them, and they were baptized. Salvation was revealed to them, and fully enjoyed by them. And so there are many such instances that tell us that if we order our conversation aright we shall find that God will show us His salvation. I fear many who need salvation do not feel the need of it, and they do not set out in good earnest in the search for it. What says the Redeemer? "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many will seek to enter in and shall not be able." "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" "I will profess" in that day, "I never knew you." Is it not clear and obvious then, that if we seek earnestly we shall not fail to find; but that we cannot expect to find if we do not obey? A man is not to say, "I cannot obey;" he is to try to obey, he is to trust to obey. Stretch forth the withered hand, and he stretched it forth. "Whatever is not of faith is sin." But a little faith is a great thing, if a man is trying to overcome sin, and doing his duty, learning to do well and ceasing to do evil, breaking up the fallow ground, sowing "in righteousness," and reaping "in mercy." How beautiful the connexion and harmony, sowing in righteousness, reaping in mercy! The proud Pharisaical man would say sow in righteousness, and reap in recompense, and reward, and merit, and desert; but so says not the Word of

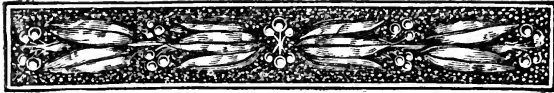
God. We are to sow in righteousness, and to seek to see the salvation of God, through the mercy of and in Christ Jesus. Yes, be assured of this, "if any man be willing to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine"—there is the same beautiful sequence,—“if any man” be willing (for that is the original) to do the will of the Father, “he shall know of the doctrine.” There is a man seeking to do the will of God, comparatively ignorant of the way of peace: but, says Christ, “he shall know of the doctrine;” it shall be taught him, he shall learn it, light shall dawn upon him. And Christ says, “I am the light of the world; he that believeth on me shall not walk in darkness.” He does not say he that *speaks* about me, he that *thinks* about me, he that calls me “Lord, Lord,” but he that *believes* on me, and follows me, shall not walk in darkness.

The subject then is a deeply personal and practical one, and speaks to every man who desires to be saved. And is there a man who does not desire it, if he is not morally mad? Oh, the terrific guilt of a careless immortal soul! how terrible, if a man neglects it and shipwrecks it! The awful thought sometimes makes one tremble. Is a man to be indifferent about it, and to eat and drink and just enjoy this poor fleeting breath that is in his nostrils? Where is he? what is he? what will become of him for ever? Ought not a man to think about these things? O brethren, if a man does feel an interest and earnestness in these things, surely he should follow the plain directions of the word of God, “Seek the Lord” here “while He may be found;” call upon Him now, “Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.” “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 him.” Dear brethren, it is not the measure of a man’s light that is the test, but it

is a man's acting up with earnestness to that light. "He that hath, to him shall be given; and to him that hath not, from him shall be taken away, even what he seemeth to have." How many there are who lose the little light they once had, and become all blind through a hardened conscience. Alas! for them. If they had improved the little they would have received more. And never forget it, I beseech you, that if infidelity and unbelief slay their thousands, indifferentism, and presumption, and self-worldliness, and neglect slay their tens of thousands. If you are not in earnest in seeking eternal life,—as you are not while you are going on in worldiness,—“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Therefore, brethren, I beseech you, seek the Lord earnestly and honestly. Lay open your neglected Bibles, think over them, try to lay them to heart, pray that you may pray—pray for the Spirit, and pray for faith if you have not faith. The best evidence that you have the Spirit is that you are trying to work for God. Guard against vain thoughts in the house of God—against bringing there your business and your counting houses, and your speculations, and your worldly schemes; for God sees still just as plainly as the eye of Jesus saw the tables of the money-changers in the temple. Set about it, and try to watch against the sins that easily beset you; try to do what is right, come down and sit humbly, and bow lowly at the foot of the cross. Never forget it, brethren, if a man waits some twenty, forty, sixty, or four-score years, what is it to eternity? It is “he that endureth to the end” and overcomes that “shall be saved,” it is *he* that gets the victory. “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back,” shall be saved. Let us, “forgetting those things which are behind,” look forward to the things which are before, and press onward to the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. And, dear brethren, have faith in God, have faith in His pro-

mises. He has said, "I will show you the salvation of God;" therefore do not doubt it. Let no man shake your confidence, let not the devil shake it, let not discouragements and disappointments shake it; but be like Abraham, the father of the faithful, who offered up his only son in faith. And still order your conversation aright, and sooner or later you shall have the salvation of God shown to you; for, says God Himself, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away."





XIV.

PRAYER.

“Behold, he prayeth.”—ACTS ix. part of 11.

How mighty the transforming power of the grace of God ! It was but a few years before that it might have been said of Saul by the principalities and powers of darkness, “Behold, he persecuteth.” He was “exceedingly mad” against the followers of the Lord Jesus, and went about “breathing threatenings and slaughter against the saints from Jerusalem to Damascus, with authority from the chief priests to bring bound to Jerusalem those that called upon the name of the Lord Jesus ; but now, when the Lord himself had appeared unto him by the way, and had arrested him suddenly by His own voice, and had begun His great work in Him by the power of His Spirit, and had commissioned Ananias to go and restore his sight, and say to him words by which he might be further instructed in the high office to which he was destined, when Ananias doubted, because he had persecuted the Church of Christ, the Lord Jesus said to him, “Behold, he prayeth.” It is a happy thing when it can be said of any one “he prayeth.” It is the breath of the new-born babe in Christ. No sooner does a babe come into the world than it breathes, and often it expresses its breath in its feeble cry ; and no sooner does the new-born babe in Christ come into the Church in deed and in truth, than *it* breathes, and breathing, it cries to the Lord ; and, though its cry be

often feeble, indeed, and broken, and interrupted, and scarcely more than a sigh, yet, with perseverance and power, it has hope that it will be presented in heaven by Him who will not "break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax," and be heard by Him who is the God of grace and of all consolation. Seldom or ever has there been one brought to God in Christ that was more distinguished by a spirit of prayer than Saul, afterwards Paul, the preacher of righteousness. Examine his writings, and you find that no man pervades them with a more constant spirit of devotion ; no one of the Scripture writers dips his pen more in his own heart, and writes according to his inmost experiences, insomuch that, as he lays open his own heart before us, his character is stamped and photographed upon each page. He tells us what manner of man he was, he takes us into his closet, he takes us into the struggles of his breast, he takes us into his joys and his sorrows, he takes us up on to the mount of revelation, and down into the valley of humiliation, and in all we still find him the same man, true to that pole to which he was magnetised by the cross of Christ. It was said by Him who magnetised him by His Spirit, "Behold, he prayeth." There is no doubt Saul, the Pharisee, had oftentimes said prayers, that he had stood at the corners of the streets, and that in his closet and in the synagogues he had said long prayers ; yet now it is said of him, as if it were for the first time, as if he had never prayed before,—and he never had in the heart to God,—“Behold, he prayeth.”

We shall lead you then, brethren, to contemplate the *prayer of the formalist*:—the *prayer of the penitent*:—and the *prayer of the saint*.—St. Paul furnishes us with a beautiful platform from which these kinds of prayer may be viewed. May God by His Spirit teach us to pray, and enable us to pray, so that it may be with each one of us prayer in the heart to God.

The prayer of the formalist.—No doubt, as I have said,

Saul had often prayed after this sort. He had been punctual at his prayers; he was constant in them as was Daniel, who at morning and at noonday and at eventide, three times a day, knelt and prayed before God, his window being open towards Jerusalem. Very likely Saul had been as punctual as Daniel; for he belonged to the strictest sect of the Jews, he was a Pharisee, he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and therefore he was very exemplary and devout after his own way. His prayers may have been orderly, scriptural, and beautiful; and no doubt men often pray very beautifully and earnestly, as far as the sound of the voice goes, when it is not the breath of the heart, when there is the falling down, the form and the ceremony, but not the inward fire that kindles the sacrifice. You have a very apt illustration of the prayer of the formalist in the worshippers of Baal. All was arranged in the fashion of a sacrifice; there was the altar, and the wood, and the bullock; but there was no fire, therefore there was but the shadow and semblance, there was no reality. But how different was it with that neighbouring altar! There was the altar of stone unhewn, as was designed by God; there was the wood laid on the altar; there was the sacrifice cut up and laid upon it ready for the offering; and then, beyond all and above all, there was fire from heaven that lighted up the burnt-offering, and so the sweet savour went up to heaven, and God regarded it, and men beheld His power, and cried with one voice, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God." So it must be if a man is ever to pray in truth; his fire must come from heaven. Many are working themselves into a frenzy and enthusiasm, they are praying with a bodily exercise, they are exciting their emotions and agitating their hearts; and yet all is carnal and fleshly, a mere outward semblance and shadow. The fire must come from above; earthly fire only provides earthly sacrifices. Most of you have been taught to bend your knees stately in prayer, and probably you would not

feel comfortable without going through the solemnity ; probably in the morning very few of you go from your closets without the exercise of prayer ; probably there are times when you are specially drawn to humble yourselves, in times of sorrow and trouble, in times of anxiety and fear of death, and anticipation of judgment ; but, after all, if this is emotional, if the prayers are but a stated form that you go through, perhaps your thoughts wandering elsewhere all the time, perhaps all the while in a state of doubt and unbelief, and if you were to stop and think, you would be filled with misgivings ; if this be so, you have no communion or contact with the world unseen, or with the Father of spirits, who “ is a Spirit,” and who must be worshipped “ in spirit and in truth.” Beware, and do not deceive yourselves with your devotions and prayers. Remember—

“ Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,
Unutter’d or express’d :
The motion of a hidden fire,
That trembles in the breast.”

It is from within the prayer must go. It is not simply from memory or emotion or feeling, but it is from within ; it is from the secret helping of the Holy Ghost, “ for we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

Keep in mind, then, that Saul, the Pharisee, often prayed in the sight of man, but not in the sight of God, until he became Paul, *the penitent*—until he became a humble, broken-hearted man, stripped of his robe of fancied righteousness, and naked before his God, not caring to lift up his eyes to heaven, like the poor publican, but smiting upon his breast ; then he became Paul, the suppliant, and then began his true prayer. No man prays aright until he is humbled in the dust, until he is constrained by an earnest desire for salvation and mercy. Some men come knocking at the door as if they had a right

to receive, claiming what they ask when they come. Many ask for grace they do not desire. They ask that they may overcome the world, when they love it and serve it ; they ask God to give them His blessed Spirit, and they refuse to be led by that Spirit, for they love the flesh and the things of the flesh ; and after they have prayed in this spirit, they expect an answer to their prayers. They think they have done their duty—they have performed their task, they have gone through their miserable round of formality. Beware of that spirit. Seek to come, not as the proud Pharisee, and stand before heaven, challenging its admiration, and saying, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are ;” such an one, we are told, shall go down to his house unjustified as he came from it ; but seek to draw near to Him in a humble spirit. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” If we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon Him, to such as call upon Him in sincerity. Then He hearkens, and He says to such an one as He said to the penitent Ephraim, “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus ; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke : turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented ; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh : I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : therefore my bowels are troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.” Oh, would you have Christ, so go in the spirit of Ephraim ; tell not God your excellencies, but your faults ; plead not your own righteousness, but your own helplessness, and misery, and bankruptcy ; come to Him who can discharge all the debt of the poor sinner, to Him who was wounded unto

death ; look to Him, and you will find relief. Saul, the persecutor, now Paul, the penitent, passed three days and nights in the deepest supplication before God ; and in his distress and anguish, he had, I believe, sweet thoughts, and hopes, and consolations. As one of the old writers quaintly says, "There is more pleasure in the pains of repentance than in all the pleasures of the vain world." A man begins in his repentance to see things as they are, he comes to his right mind, he comes from being beside himself, and, like the poor prodigal, he catches a glimpse of his father from afar off, and he pleads, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants." Beautifully is it said in one of our own scriptural prayers, that God "despisest not the sighing of a contrite heart, nor the desire of such as be sorrowful," and so it was in the case of Saul ; the Lord who listened to him in his dark chamber at Damascus prepared one of His own disciples, and with His own voice instructed him to go and visit that poor, lonely, and pleading penitent, and that very day he looked upon him, and bade him, in the name of the Lord Jesus, arise and be baptized, and wash his sins away. So, brethren, it will be with you if you are brought to that broken, contrite heart that God will not despise, and ask of God to take away from you the hard heart of stone, and give you the heart of flesh. A stony heart can never hold the waters of repentance, but when it is struck with the rod of Christ, then from the flinty rock will gush the streams of living water. The Lord God will approve the work of His own hands, He will listen to the voice of His own Spirit ; for the Lord "knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Blessed be God, there is a fire that can kindle their cold hearts, there is a rod that can smite the hardened hearts, and make them yield fountains of water. Many are apt to be impatient in

prayer, and to think that they call upon God in vain, because He strengthens faith by proving faith, and by exercising it He establishes it. To the poor woman who sought Him with tears and deep sighs He made as if He heeded her not, as if He turned a hard heart and a deaf ear to her sorrows, and it appeared almost as if to her sorrow was added insult. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs," said Jesus. But the poor, gentle penitent pleaded still, and she overcame by pleading. As it was with Jacob, who would not let the angel go until he had blessed him; so it was with the blessed Angel of the Covenant when walking in the world in human form, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. When she replied, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table," He answered her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." It was a faith that could not be put off—a faith that would not be denied. Her faith was strengthened, and glory came to His own grace through the manifestation of her faith unto the rich "recompense of the reward." Follow the example of that poor woman; do not be impatient. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Then ye shall seek me "and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Do not be discouraged, though the twilight lasts long, it is the beginning of the day-spring; and if you wait, it shall break forth into the full rising "Sun of Righteousness," "with healing in His wings."

And then, brethren, the prayer of the penitent will be turned into *the prayer of the saint*. That crowns all. You cannot have an illustration of the prayer of the saint more beautiful and full than may be traced through all the epistles of Paul. In his approaches to God in the secrecy of his closet, how beautiful are some of his prayers! He did not rest, as some would do, in just getting to heaven himself, or in believing that he was just saved; nor had he but a tremb-

ling heart, or feel the want of "the full assurance of hope unto the end;" but he prayed and pleaded on till his soul was bathed in light, and all darkness was done away; he prayed and pleaded until God who caused the light to shine out of darkness had shined into his heart; and he, beholding in Him as in a glass the glory of the Lord, was changed by the divine Photographer, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. And, more especially, how glorious were his intercessory prayers. These are especially the province and the privilege of the established believer. When we are absorbed in our own sorrows and sins, we almost forget all others in our own peril, and perplexity, and desire for acceptance in Jesus and hope of eternal life. How beautifully did St. Paul deal with his brethren in the faith, how he prayed to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" that He would give all those for whom he prayed that they might be "rooted and grounded in love," comprehending with all saints the height, and breadth, and depth of the love of God: how beautifully he brings before the Great Head of the universal Church all their sorrows, and needs, and distresses, and temptations. His heart seems to enlarge, so that he comprehends all in the arms of his affection; and you see into the depths of his spirit, and find him full of love to all men. How beautiful this privilege of intercessory prayer. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." There are those who object to the beautiful services of our Church, because they so largely deal with intercession, bringing in the arms of faith our monarch the Queen, the Royal Family, the Parliament, and the various estates of the realm, the captive, the widow, and the fatherless, the traveller by sea and land; but those who object to her services on this account might just as well object to the prayers of St. Paul.

Fulness of intercession ought to characterize the Church, if she has arrived at all at the mature "stature of the fulness of Christ." The Church ought not to be always a babe, lisping her infant prayers; she ought not to be ever penitent and absorbed in her own sorrows, and sufferings, and sins; but she should rise above this, and forget herself in the glory of God and the salvation of a lost world. Therefore, as members of the same community, bound together in ties that ought to strengthen the whole, the intercessory and propitiatory prayers of the Church of England are in beautiful harmony with the words of prayer given us by inspired men, and above all by Him who inspired them, and who taught them to pray, not for an inheritance for themselves alone, but for the whole world,—*"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven:"*—and then man may come down to his own nearer needs, and sorrows, and sins, and say, *"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever."* Surely the key-note of devotion is struck there, and the more a Church is in harmony with that key-note, the more she is attuned to the ear that hears the prayers of His people. Therefore, brethren, I do feel that the spirit of intercession is too little amongst us in this day, that the Church too little gives God no rest till He pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and hasten the coming of His kingdom. O brethren, what a beautiful example of intercessory prayer, when winged by faith, we have in that case of the father of the faithful, when he pleaded for forty, or thirty, and as low down even as ten, in that fated city of Sodom. What a power, too, in pleading with God in the case of Moses, the servant of God. When God was provoked to wrath by the hardness of heart, and the

abominable unbelief of His chosen people, He said, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them." "Let me alone;" as if the arm of Omnipotence were arrested by the hand of faith, as if it were fastened by the mighty power of believing prayer! As we showed you that unbelief, by fatal power, could bind the hand of the Infinite, insomuch that He could do no mighty works where He was by reason of their unbelief; so the power of faith is such that it bends the arm of Omnipotence—not from blessing, but from destroying—not from stretching forth the sceptre of His grace, but from stretching forth the sword of His wrath and consuming and destroying them.

There is one more point beautifully illustrated in St. Paul in his closet; he abounded in "thanksgiving." He gives us the beautiful order: "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." St. Paul is full of praise. Thus we find in the very chapter read in our ears to-night: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." "Blessed be God." How beautiful is this, coming as it were in full rapture and adoration nearer to heaven, because heaven's employment is eternal praise! We have seen many times in the aged and worn Christian, almost upon the verge of the river of death, such an abounding of praise that there has scarcely been room for prayer. Prayer has indeed had its place, but praise has had the largest place; and the spirit ready to depart has seemed, on the verge of the dark valley, to catch the echoes of the harps of the angels, and heaven has seemed to have begun on earth. Do not deceive yourselves, brethren; better one single, humble, penitent sigh, such as the publican sent up to heaven, than the longest prayer of the

Pharisee, who thought himself better than others. Remember, you must realize your wants; you must feel that you do desire that Master; let this be the echo of your heart; and your petitions must be of the heart, in faith, through Christ. Prayer is a desire kindled by a sense of want, and it must be winged by faith in its ascent to God. If there is no faith, the prayer cannot be carried to God; but if prayer is thus offered, God will not forget to be gracious. The Spirit of God does not excite expectations, in order that they may be disappointed; God does not call men to seek Him in vain; therefore, brethren, let not delays or discouragements dishearten you, or drive you back, but rather incite you more to wait still upon your God, and "give him no rest" till He have mercy upon you.

And if you have, through grace, found mercy, indulge yourselves in calm, peaceful, intercessory prayer; help on the work of God, for he allows us to be instruments in His hands. It is the same with God whether He works by instruments or without them, whether He smites the rock by the shepherd's simple rod, or works by His own immediate presence and power. He is not less mighty in the shaking of the rod than in the rush of the whirlwind. This encourages us to be earnest in pleading with Him; and, therefore, many on the bed of sickness, in the closet, and in secrecy, will be found to have done more, perhaps, when the secret springs that move His moral government in the Church universal are disclosed,—have done more to glorify His name, to increase "the number of His elect," and to "hasten His kingdom," than the most active amongst us; for God looks upon the poor suppliant in the closet. And do not let praise be absent from your prayers, and the time is not far distant when the earnest believer and man of prayer shall have his prayer lost in eternal praise.



XV.

THE INWARD ILLUMINATION OF THE SOUL.

“The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”—PSALM cxix. 130.

IT is deeply to be feared, and more deeply still, if possible, to be deplored, that there are so many who have Bibles in their houses, who have Bibles in their hands, and in the church habitually listen to the words of the Bible as preached to them, and yet, after all, their minds are in a state of darkness; they have no certain guide, they have no experimental effect from the Word, they live very much as they would live if they had not the Bible, except that they have a certain decent conformity to the customs of the country, and a certain general, vague respect for what they call the Word of God. It is too sadly plain that many have the Bible, and yet have it not; they have it as a book, but they have it not in them as a principle of life. Until God opens their eyes, and enlightens their minds, and renews their spirits, it will be so. It is one thing to have the Bible in the house, in the hands, in the mind, in the ear, and it is another thing to have it in the heart, and in the life. It is not enough that a man have the light around him, he must have it enter into him; otherwise he will still walk in darkness, he will still stumble and fall, and stumble on until at last he will “stumble upon the dark mountains,” and he will find that the light which he supposed he had got has gone out.

The words of the sweet singer of Israel that you have just listened to, give us a very clear, and exceedingly personal, account of how the child of God gets his light, and of how it becomes the inward lamp of his soul, burning ever, and brightening as it burns, till it is lost in the full blaze of the world to come. "The entrance of Thy words." The Hebrew teaches us that the entrance here is not to be understood as the porch of the word; it is not to be understood as the first elements of the word,—though in that sense it would be true; for the rudiments of God's Word teach man what nothing else teaches, what the halls of philosophy and the universities of learning never of themselves could teach a man. So the expression "entrance," is not the porch, but "the entering in of Thy words," the finding admission, the having admission opened to them into the soul's secret chambers of a man's hidden life, giving light and understanding unto the simple.

The entrance of God's words:—the result of that entrance:—those in whom that entrance and that result find place.—These three points embrace, as you perceive at once, the whole of the psalmist's sentence. May we, by the same Spirit who gave the word, be led to receive it with such simplicity and meekness, that it may enter effectually into each one of us, and prove itself the light of God.

The entrance of Thy Words.—That is the key, that is the hinge on which the whole turns. It is one thing to have light about us, and it is another thing to have a perception of the light. You are all familiar with the fact that if a man be blind—if his sight, from whatever cause, be taken from him, or much more if he be born blind, which is the true parallel of man's fallen mind,—it matters comparatively little to him how bright the sun may shine, how full the blaze that surrounds him; it is to him as if all were midnight—it is one blank blackness. He hears what is said by those who have their eyes open, he hears about the things seen by others, he hears

of brilliancy, he hears of beautiful colours and reflections all around him, and he fancies, perhaps, in some degree that he sees—as you will find blind people asserting that they do, so familiar are they with the language that they gain the phraseology, and they will look the way which the phraseology describes, and they will speak of each other, and of seeing each other, and of talking to one another as if they were quite familiar with each other's features. But, after all, it is an illusion. It may be a pleasure to them at times, but it is painful when the fact that it is an illusion bursts upon them, and, at times, it causes them a pang of feeling that language cannot realize. It is to them a sound, and no more. A man may be so foolish and infatuated as wilfully to dislike the light. There have been individuals of such strangely constituted minds as to shrink from the light, and they have dwelt in an artificial state of darkness; they have barred out the light, they have kept out by shutters the light of the sun. What does the light avail to them? But when the man born blind begins to see men as trees walking, and the human face divine—when he looks upon the intelligent expression of the human face—when he looks upon the bright blue sky, upon the lofty mountains, upon the glorious sun irradiating all around that before had been as chaos to him, upon the mighty ocean, upon the fair landscape, and upon the smiling flowers, all displaying the glory with which God has enriched this world, oh what a new disclosure it must be to that man! And so, to take the apposite and kindred illustration, it is possible, when a man who has lived without light, and fire, and candle, takes down his shutters, and unbars his doors, and the light breaks in upon him, the discovery he makes is startling and disgusting; for he is surrounded with filthiness, and all is disorder; whereas he had fancied himself to be surrounded with cleanliness and comfort, because of the illusion. The darkness of our nature, the darkness of man, cannot discover, it cannot

discern the things of light. They put "light for darkness" and "darkness for light," "bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter;" there is an inversion of judgment, a want of light and understanding, there is a want of discernment and perception, and men are in delusion and as in a dream. Is it not so very sadly with a multitude of those who profess to call themselves Christian, of those who walk amid the light of God's Word? They have the light around them, but it is not within them; their eyes are sealed, and they cannot perceive the things that belong to their peace; they close the shutters by prejudice, by pride, by worldliness, by unbelief, by hardness of heart, by indifference, and they shrink from the light, very much for the reason that a man does who is afraid that the light shining into his dwelling must disturb him and distress him, or that the light will test and reveal what is disgusting, and therefore they strive to cherish the darkness, because they dislike the discoveries that the light would make. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Does not the drunkard love darkness? Does not the unclean man, does not the impure man, does not the unbeliever, does not the proud, does not the prejudiced, love darkness? It is the inclination that is wrong; it is the heart that gives a bribe to what blinds it. A man has his misgivings and fearful suspicions that he ought to see the light, and that it is not right with him; but, like the sluggard that turns on his bed, he says, A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep. So it is with many; they cherish a present but a false and a perishing peace, because they shrink from disquietude and disturbance, from the temporary struggle, from humiliation and distress. They sow in darkness, and reap in despair; when they might sow in light, and reap the harvest of eternity and glory. It is, beloved, this absence of the inward illumination of the soul that leaves man in this

fearful illusion and false peace. What we want is this—if we are yet in darkness—not merely to read the Bible, not merely to hear it preached and explained, and to assent to it, and to commit it to memory, and even to be familiar with it, and taught it, “line upon line and precept upon precept,” and to answer questions, and to have a certain amount of intellectual understanding of it, but the great thing is for it to enter into us.

The *entrance* of Thy words. Oh, how different a thing it is to the mere reading of the Word! How different it was with Lydia, when the Lord opened her heart; how different it was with those who lifted up their hands and shed the blood of Jesus, when the word of God was brought home to them and entered into their consciences! Then were they “pricked in their heart,” and said, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” There was alarm because of the light that had entered into their hearts, and it led them to believe with joy and gladness. When they discovered the light, the things that in darkness had been distasteful to them became beautiful; in the presence of the light that “shineth more and more unto the perfect day” they were “full of joy and gladness.” It is the shrinking from the light that is the infatuation. We *must* see at last, either by the lurid light of hell, or by the clear light and the calm brightness of eternity in heaven. Men cannot go on in darkness for ever; the lie will not last long; but men will have to meet the light of God in the opening up of the great day, and then it will be too late for men to say, “Lord, Lord, open to us;” or, “Lord, Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.” The day will be passed, and the night will be set in for ever! The “entrance of God’s words,” by the power of the Spirit, unlooses the deaf ear, unscales the blind eyes, and breaks down pride, prejudice, unbelief, lust, and passion. A man then finds light stealing in upon him, and what a new thing it is to him! What a

new thing it is when a man reads his Bible in the light of the Spirit! The light is within him, and he not merely clings to the very letters and words,—as many do, reading the chapter and not being able to tell what they have read, for their minds have been far away, and though they have heard all the words, they have heard them as a matter of form to satisfy conscience, or to delude themselves, there is no communion between their minds and the ideas they have heard read—what a different thing, I say, it is when a man finds the light unfolding itself, holding up to him the mercy of another life, telling him the cause of the state of his own mind, detecting his secret motives, and opening up a vista that at the first has an appearance of alarm; but it reveals to him redemption, it shows to him God, who created a heavenly creation, and out of the ruins of man's fallen nature built up and adorned a beautiful temple fit for God. “The entrance of Thy words giveth light.” St. Paul describes it thus, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;” and again he describes it when he says—“The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” Oh, how the devil tries to keep men in darkness, how he tries to keep out the light! He is the prince of darkness, he is one of the principalities and powers of darkness; and therefore darkness is his congenial element, and he likes to keep his children in darkness; then they are his prisoners, for he has them in “chains of darkness.”

Look at the *beautiful effect of the entrance of God's words*. He giveth “light” and He giveth much “understanding.” The minds and hearts of most men are in a very dark state; and if people look manfully into themselves, they will find very little to give them encouragement, and comfort, and complacency;

for, after all, though people may know a good deal, though they may have a good deal of scholarship, though they may know many languages, though they may have distinguished mathematical and scientific skill and understanding, still in the things that belong to their eternal destiny, in their moral interests, in man's state and nature in regard to his own soul,—that little microcosm of such infinite interest to man, that it most concerns him to know ; that shows him what he is, and how he is and how it stands between him and his God, and what is his relationship with reference to the great judgment seat, and with regard to the final condition of his soul ;—what confusion and darkness there is in many men's minds ! Mercantile men would be ashamed if their commercial affairs were in the state their own heads and hearts are in ; they would be ashamed if their books and their accounts of what is owing to them were in the state of embarrassment and confusion they allow the books and the accounts of the inner man to remain in, when that book must be shortly opened up in the presence of the great Judge, who will determine whether they are solvent or bankrupt, for ever and evermore. How sad it is that men should thus allow the counting-houses of their hearts to be unsearched, and the book within them to be forgotten ; the day-book and the ledger of their spirits to be not cast up, unbalanced, and unsettled ! They would be ashamed, I say, of such a state of things in regard to their poor, secular, perishing, affairs, which are, in comparison, as a grain of sand to the mighty universe, and as the merest insect that crawls in the dust. Judge yourselves, brethren. "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?" And is not a man in danger of losing his soul, if he allows it to remain in confusion, and permits the accounts of his heart to remain unbalanced and unsettled ?" Oh, brethren, what a different thing it is, when God's words enter the heart, in the power, and the beauty, and the light of divine energy ! Then

man begins to see the real state of things within him, then he begins to discern the things which belong to his everlasting peace, then he begins to have real understanding. Men boast of their understanding, they are proud of it; but, after all, it is arrant folly if they have not immortal wisdom. What is it for a man to have understanding for three-score years and ten, and then to find himself an everlasting fool? What will it avail a man to have worldly understanding, and fortune, and distinction, and to leave a name and fame behind him, when, by and by, all will pass away, and a man's soul will go forth to the presence of his Maker and his Judge? What a fool a man is to call this understanding! Call it not understanding; it is gilded folly, it is crafty, astute, cunning idiocy; and the man who so trusts is but a fool! After all, what is wisdom, if it is not a future and everlasting possession? Though a man should know every herb that springs from the hillside, from the hyssop to the cedars of Lebanon, though he should know all the stars and their various systems, though he should know all the wonders of the planetary worlds; yet if he knows not the "balm in Gilead" to the healing of his soul, if he knows not the Star of Bethlehem to guide him to the Sun of righteousness, the star that will never set, but will shine on unto everlasting day; after all, what is his understanding? has he much that is great or desirable? I have known men of extreme power of intellect, of great scientific knowledge, very astute, and singularly skilled in the things of the earth, yet when they came to the deep things of God—to redemption, to the Trinity in Unity, to Christ's propitiation for man, and to man's capacity for the fellowship of God for ever—when they came to the things of the inner life of man, they were utter simpletons. Talk to them of the things of God, and they would not understand you. And why? Because they have never had the entrance of God's words into their souls,

and therefore all their understanding cannot profit them. It is of the earth, earthy. After all, they are limited to the poor, little, narrow horizon of this passing world, and when they get to the threshold of the higher and glorious world for which we are made, all is darkness, and all is ignorance. "I thank thee," said Jesus, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Yes, you will many a time find a poor child, a Sunday school scholar, a poor, unlearned widow, a poor weaver who plies his shuttle day by day, a poor shepherd tending his little flock of sheep, and if you take them into the things of God, they will show you that they have a right understanding, and that they discern what the world does not discern, but despises and condemns, and shows it does not follow, by condemning; and in a little while, that poor child, that widow woman, that weaver, that shepherd, will have the peace that is laid up for them, and that shineth forth when all about is dark. And what will become of the man with all his attainments for threescore years and ten? At the hour of his death all "his thoughts perish"—all his fame, all his wisdom, will vanish; he had to do with the earth, he went no further and no higher; therefore, naked as he came from his mother's womb, so naked shall he return to his Maker.

Then, brethren, who is it that have this entrance, and as a consequence, have light and understanding through God's words? "*The entrance of Thy words giveth life; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*" A very simple description of what is of unspeakable moment. A "simple" person! People are apt to mistake simple for what is very unlike it—true simplicity. A simple person is often a person who has no understanding and wisdom. But simple here means sincere, honest—a person who has a right aim, a right eye.

What says the Saviour of such? "If thine eye be single"—rendered sometimes simple—if thine eye be simple, "thy whole body shall be full of light." There is the entrance of God's words. "But if thine eye be evil,"—if it be double, if it be hypocritical, if it be deceitful,—"thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness?" It has often struck me how gracious it is of God, how merciful, that He should put the condition of our receiving the inward light, not upon intellectual and moral capacity. Oh, if He had rested it upon intellect, upon philosophy, upon science, or rank, or natural power of intellect, if He had promised it to the man who could master different languages, or overcome profound and difficult problems; but, so far from this, it is just the reverse; for this is what the Spirit of God tells us of His work, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence;" and it is added, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Brethren, what is, then, the peculiar qualification that God hath respect for in teaching His people, and making them wise unto salvation? Being humble, simple, teachable, and of no account in their own understandings. The evidence that we have received the truth of God is, that we have a simple, lowly, and submissive spirit. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and "the meek will He teach His way." When

Jesus would teach us how we must become, in order that we may enter into His blessed kingdom, He called a little child, and set it in the midst, and said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The entrance of the words of God into the heart, is the entrance of the soul into the kingdom of heaven; when a man has got the light of God's truth in the heart, he begins to enter the world of light—he walks as a child of the light, and walks in darkness no more.

Then, brethren, this is, after all, worthy of the great God. We are apt to look upon poor people who are not educated highly, and are not doing much in the world, with pity, and to look up to Galileo, and Newton, and Milton, and Shakespeare, and such men, as somebody wonderful; but, after all, the poorest creatures, if they are taught by the Spirit of God, if the words of God have entered their souls, in a very little time—perhaps in the twinkling of an eye—will know more than Galileo, or Milton, or Newton, or Shakespeare; they will have more than mere intellect and mere speculation. After all, *that* is the great and true wisdom that is from above, and a man has learned enough if he has learned to be ready for the great end. If he has learned that, that is understanding; and unless the Spirit of God by His Word impress this upon us, we deceive ourselves, we are deceived, and we deceive others. The phraseology of our familiar works, the language of our publications, of our learned men, and of our newspapers, have all the same tendency, and men walk "in a vain shadow." They want the entrance of God's words to give them light; that is the true centre, the imperishable light, the light of the Word of God.

Then, beloved brethren, oh do remember, we must not be

content with having the words on our lips, on our memories ; but we must pray that God will cause His words to enter into our hearts, to give us that inward demonstration of His word that will make us become new creatures in thought, in purpose, in desires, in disposition, in judgment ; that we may see things in a different and in another light. Oh, the difference of things seen in the light of sense and time, and in the light of eternity,—in the light of man, and in the light of God ! Oh the difference, what a difference ! Seek it, that you may know that difference, by (as it is beautifully said) “passing from darkness to light,” by being transplanted out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Always look to Jesus and His word, to teach and lead you by His Spirit. He says, “I am the light of the world ; he that believeth in me shall not walk in darkness.”

And, dear brethren, prize more the precious Bible, the very words of God. All the rest is uncertain. There may be little misapprehensions, there may be minute mistranslations, little spots, as it were, through the long chain of years through which the blessed Word has passed ; but it is like the sun, as I have seen through a telescope ; there are spots, very small, so small that the naked eye does not discern them, but I believe when the sun was first made it was not so, and the spots are the result, probably, of some nebular change, or of some change in the location and relationship of the solar system ; but, whatever their origin, they do not disparage the sun, and a man would be a fool to say, “I will not look in the light of the sun, because there are spots on it, and it is not clear ; so, after all, I prefer the lamp or the candle.” What a fool he would be ! And how much more foolish to deal in such a way with that sun that is the light in this poor dark heart of ours—the Word of God. Men talk of little blemishes—possibly little mistakes—in

different translations, which have crept in, but they do not affect the original light. It came from God, and a man with true wisdom will walk by that heavenly guide, he will follow that heavenly light, and will say, "Well, if there are some little errors of translations, it is guide enough for me; it is made to me wisdom and salvation; it is my joy, it is my light, it is my comfort; I have no certainty, no assurance, but as that blessed Word gives it me; therefore, I cling to my Bible, and will cling to it through life and to my dying hour." Brethren, do learn this great thing, to seek for a simple, sincere, Christ-like mind. When you read the Bible with a simple and sincere mind, how very plain and beautiful it seems, but when you get doubt blinding your eyes, keeping you from seeing the light, and fixing your attention on the things of this world, then the Bible becomes confused and uncertain, and you have a distaste for it. You will find your relish for the Bible to be very much the thermometer of your soul. If you feel an interest in God's words, if you delight in hearing them preached, then "thank God and take courage," for you will not be walking in darkness long, but, by and bye, you will find the light begin to come to you, and you will welcome it with joy and gladness.





XVI.

THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH.

“According to your faith be it unto you.”—ST. MATT. ix. part of 29.

WE cannot too constantly remember that faith is strength, that doubt is weakness, and that unbelief is impotence. Less cannot be said of true faith than that it is the hinge of salvation, the vital nerve of spiritual life. It is impossible, therefore, for the ministers of Christ too frequently or explicitly to enlarge on so momentous a theme, nor is it well possible for the people of Christ to covet it or to pray over it too earnestly or too constantly. Mistake on other points must be injurious, but mistake on this point cannot fail to be fatal. If we have much faith, we shall have much blessing; if we have little faith, we shall have scanty blessing; and if we have no faith, we shall have no blessing.

We shall endeavour to show you *why it is thus ordained by God*:—that *this is as reasonable as it is sound*:—that *all revelation that is of God must be in harmony with, not perverted by, reason*--reason as God gave it, and not as man has perverted it. This, then, is our subject. Let our hearts rise up to God that He would teach us aright, and put into our hearts a living faith, and keep it in full life until it is perfected in sight!

“According to your faith be it unto you.” This is God’s own appointment. They are the words of Him who will judge us, and it ought to suffice that He has said them.

There can be nothing that forms so absolute a ground of confidence, and so absolute a reason for obedience, as the pronouncement of God; there is nothing so certain in the universe as what God says; it is right, therefore, because He says it; and it should be received implicitly, because it has His authority; and obeyed unceasingly, because He hath affirmed it. And, indeed, if a man has a simple submissive spirit, the question he will ask is, "What saith the Lord? Let God be true, and all men liars. I stand to what He says; and if there be any risk—but there is not—I risk my all on the truth of God." That is the very nerve, strength, and sinew of true faith. And that God has said it is very clear, not from this declaration alone, but we continually find it: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"—"Believe ye that I am able to do this?"—"If thou canst believe"—"Without faith it is impossible to please God"—"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." What can be more explicit and clear? The principle pervades the whole revelation of God; and in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, you will find that it is God's appointment, that by and through faith men come to Him, receive blessings from Him, and are accepted of Him. The 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is abundant evidence that this is no new doctrine, that it is no modern discovery, that it has no exaggerated importance attached to it—as some have presumptuously said—by St. Paul in his epistles; but that it is the testimony of God from the beginning to the end, from the time He graciously covenanted to give His Son to be the Saviour of lost mankind down to the present moment. Yet it has pleased God to act in this case differently from many others, and to make it apparent to our reason, and to supply the

grounds why He has so appointed that man should receive every blessing through faith.

In the first place, He has appointed it, because, as He himself says, "it is of faith, that it might be by grace;" and, therefore, it is of faith. Grace is the simple sovereign goodness and mercy of God to the undeserving. Now, this is what God specially magnifies in His gospel. He will not give His glory in this matter to another, nor share it with any creature in the universe; and, therefore, since it is all of faith, the mode in which it is applied to the recipients is through grace; the manner in which they are to become entitled to it must exhibit that grace, and magnify the freedom of that goodness. If it were in any measure of works, it would not be distinctly and manifestly of grace, because "to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And if a man were in any measure to make himself worthy of God's grace, man would have, in some measure at least, whereof to glory; he might lay claim to "the recompense of the reward," and challenge it as a right, because he had done what God requires. No doubt, there are some persons who have herein very indistinct views indeed; they believe and say that grace comes to them wholly through faith, and that they have no merit in procuring it by their obedience and endeavours; but they convert faith itself into the quickening work, and regard it as the meritorious cause of their being accepted in Christ, therefore they attach a certain merit to faith. They shrink from the reward of faith, but they do not shrink from reckoning the reward of faith. They regard faith as the grand work; and therefore, because they have it, they merit forgiveness and the peace of God. This is wholly to misunderstand the nature of faith. If a man simply receives

the testimony of God concerning His Son, if he receives what God bestows as inviolable truth, and rests upon it, and builds upon it, and accepts it, is there any merit in it? Is there any merit in a man who is a poor bankrupt, or a sentenced criminal, accepting the free pardon that is proffered to him—in accepting the gifts that are bestowed of sovereign and absolute goodness? Do you think the beggar who comes to your door, however importunate and expectant, because he condescends to open his hands and grasp the alms you bestow upon him, has any merit in so doing? Assuredly not! And just as much is there any merit in any faith that we have, when our hand is stretched out to grasp the blessed pardon sealed to us by the blood of the Lamb, to take hold of the “exceeding great and precious promises” that are guaranteed to us when we come to God in Christ, and receive all things necessary for life, for time, and for eternity. Take an illustration from Scripture. It pleased God to appoint, in order to heal those who were stung by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, that when they were in their agony and dying pangs, they were to look upon a brazen image of one of the serpents which was ordered to be set up on high in the midst of the camp of the Israelites; and if they looked, they lived, and were healed. Was there any merit in the Israelites looking? Was it not all of grace and goodness on the part of God? did they, indeed, merit aught by looking with intense desire and importunity towards the serpent? did they say, “I healed myself, or my looking towards it healed me?” No, it was the looking because God had appointed it. But they were not healed for looking—there was no merit in looking. And so when God says, look to me and live: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else,” when a man is brought to feel that he is perishing, and that he has no power to rescue

himself—when he seeks to escape for his life, he looks to Jesus with the eye of faith, when he beholds the record that “God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son: He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not life;” he beholds this; but is there any merit in it? It is all reception, it is the mendicancy of the soul; he simply accepts the glorious gifts of grace so bestowed upon him; and the faith whereby we receive is implanted in us by the power of God; “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;” so that there is the special reason assigned in Scripture for the method of salvation—or rather the method of the reception of salvation, that it should be through faith, and not through works, and through no other channel whatever, inasmuch as faith gives the sinner no share of God’s glory, but makes it, first and last, simply God’s gift; and in the reception of it, man is only a mendicant embracing a boon.

Then, brethren, it follows no less clearly that God ordained that it should be by faith that the honour might be His own. “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” Faith honours God, therefore God confers supreme honour upon faith; and if a man comes to God trusting in His mercy through the mediation and merits of Christ Jesus, then, how can he help,—must it not follow necessarily that he glorifies God? and he goes on “his way rejoicing,” for he has found pardon, and peace, and rest, and has hope towards God in eternal life, and rejoices in joy—as far as his faith is strong—“unspeakable and full of glory.” He should, therefore, indeed, say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the praise and the glory; it is by grace that I am whatsoever I am; what have I that I have not received? and if I have received it, whereof should I glory as though I had not received it? who hath made me differ

from another? it is all of grace; and when my hand was stretched forth to press to my breast the blood-bought pardon, all was bestowed by God." This, brethren, will secure the honour where alone it is due. God has ordained in His whole gospel this blessed plan, to humble the sinner and to exalt the Saviour; and this is for man's own good, not less than for God's glory. It is all that man may be brought to Christ, that he may be brought to heaven, that he may be brought to holiness. What is it that has separated man from God? Unbelief. Unbelief cast Adam and Eve from Paradise and holiness; unbelief hindered the Israelites from entering into the promised land, for though they had the promise, yet could they not enter in, because of their unbelief; unbelief hinders multitudes who hear the gospel from being saved: "Who hath believed our report?" unbelief arrests the rich mercy and grace with which God came to save us; unbelief hindered Christ from doing many mighty works in His own country. Then, if unbelief is the great source of our separation from God, faith is the great spring of our reunion with God. Until a man believes in God, how can he have fellowship with God; and until he have that fellowship, how can he be conformed to the whole image of God? Faith is the means by which man, in Christ Jesus, is brought back into the blessed fellowship of the Godhead, becomes a partaker, in a measure, of the Divine nature, and is "changed into the same image." No obedience that does not spring from faith in God through Christ can ever be a loving, living, spiritual, hearty obedience; it may be the mercenary obedience of the bondsman who dreads the lash, but it cannot be the tender-hearted obedience the loving child renders to a revered father, delighting to please him, springing forward in a moment, at a look, to do what he is told. And why? Because the child has a deep and reverential love. It is impossible,—it is not in the law of our nature—for terror and dread to procure

obedience. Doubt must be displaced by confidence, terror must be swallowed up in trust, dread must be displaced by love, before the heart can be drawn into true obedience. If this is true with regard to the things of this world, it is truer still with regard to the world to come. No man who does not love God can serve him with hearty service, and the man who does not believe in God through Christ, cannot love God. It is love of God through Christ that takes away the distance and the dread that keep a man from his Maker ; then, when the blood of Christ cleanseth us from our sins, we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son ; and fellowship produces not only resemblance, but apprehension. To be in fellowship is to be like the person we delight in and obey. It is a law of our nature that what we much love we grow like ; it has a plastic influence upon our moral being. It is thus that faith working by love produces a change in the soul, and makes a man like unto God, and brings him back again to that blessed similitude he lost through unbelief.

But, brethren, it is not only so ordained in order to man's holiness, but in order to man's happiness. Let us suppose the converse ; let us suppose that some measure of man's own work and obedience and merit were necessary, in order to entitle him to the righteousness of Christ ; let us suppose that a man had to toil and task himself in order to arrive at a certain merit and virtue and excellence, and that *then* he should take courage and believe that Christ would fill up what was lacking in his measure of obedience. Would not this make a man have no solid foundation on which to rest his hope ? would he not be distressed with the thought, "I have not done enough ?" You may see this in the man who makes faith his Saviour. If a man is looking at his faith and examining it, and doubting whether it is strong enough, and whether it is able to save him, that man will have no firm basis on which to build his hopes of peace with God. Just as he has con-

fidence will he have peace ; his confidence gives that peace. But if a man looks simply to his Saviour, instead of to his faith, he must examine himself to see if his faith is true ; and one of the best evidences of faith is love, joy, and hope, which will flow into the soul from receiving the Saviour's word, and clinging to the Saviour's righteousness. Then, a man does not build on his own merits, but on the sure covenant of God ; then, however his feelings may fail, he will be able to say, " My God is the same, my Saviour is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ; His blood still cleanses from all sin ; His foundation is laid in Zion elect and precious ; it is a corner stone, a tried stone, that can never be moved." And so the believer has a foundation to rest upon, a peace which he never could have if his expectations depended upon his obedience. He must first receive peace in Christ, and then he will have the obedience of Christ—then he will have the love that maketh heart-felt obedience. Then, indeed, he will feel, " I am saved ; I obey, because I am loved, not in order to be loved ; I obey, because I have received perfect forgiveness, not that I may supplement that gift ; I have received the gift of God, which is eternal life." And so it is beautifully pictured in the parable which so wonderfully represents the pilgrimage to heaven. No sooner did the pilgrim see the open sepulchre than his burden unloosed from his shoulder, and rolled and rolled, till it tumbled into the sepulchre, and he felt it no more. He had difficulties and conflicts and stumblings, but still the burden never came back, but became merged in the sepulchre. Therighteousness of Christ had removed it: "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all," " there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Is there not, then, reason even clear and convincing to the mind, if it is not prejudiced and blinded and warped, that it is all of faith that it might be by grace ; and that the beautiful rule laid down by the Redeemer, "According to your faith be it unto you,"

is most rational, most gracious, and most consistent with sound philosophy, if men had but their reason rectified to see things as they would, if they were not blinded and perverted.

It is a glorious subject indeed—the glorious thought that it is all of faith that it might be by grace—

“ Grace, ’tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to our ears,
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,”

And it should calm all our fears. Then, brethren, do not be “going about to establish your own righteousness,” like the Jews of old, but submit yourselves as helpless, hopeless sinners, to God, that he may receive you back to Himself, in and through Christ Jesus. Look to Him, receive Him, expect Him, take Him for your Lord, and be assured of it you will find that His “service is perfect freedom,” and that to have Him is to have peace, and a good assurance of eternal life. And recollect that you must come with a profound sense of utter undeserving. If you come as the Pharisee, thanking God for your goodness, you despise the ways of God, and have no access to Him; but if you come as the poor publican, smiting upon the breast, and saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” not making terms with God, not stipulating how you are to be saved, but receiving with all readiness the covenant He has freely made with lost sinners—and, therefore, with every sinner that at once lays hold of it—you at once enter into peace with God. Is it not so? Try it; prove it for yourselves. Then, brethren, do remember, if it is all of such simple sovereign grace, how aggravated the guilt of the man who stumbles at it, and sets it aside. Some stumble because they foresee that they must become holy, and they do not want to deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow Jesus; they do not want to do it. Others are so satisfied, and so self-confident in their own virtue and goodness, that they

cannot bear to go through the same narrow gate through which poor pilgrims and sinners of the deepest dye must go too; they would like to enter into eternity alone; but the thief on the cross, and Manasseh in the dungeon, and the prodigal that comes clothed in rags to his father's house,—they do not like that such as these should receive the best garment, and have the ring of adoption, and the shoes of “the preparation of the gospel of peace.” They are of the spirit of the elder brother who despised the man who had wasted his father's substance, and had come back again repenting. You must beware of that proud and self-righteous spirit. After all, how very near is the most virtuous and moral man to the most outcast and the most abominable? If there is a wide difference in outward appearance, what is there in the heart originally? If there is a wide difference, it has been made by God. That poor wretch you saw led to the gallows, if he had had the education and the advantages you have, would, perhaps, have been better than you are. Therefore, go to the root of the matter, and you will see that, before God, you must stoop low at the foot of the cross. All must pass through the narrow gate, all must have faith in the free grace of Christ, that so we may not have the righteous condemnation, and that God through Christ may have all the praise, and the song of the redeemed may be, “Salvation to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.”





XVII.

FAITH ASSURED AND AUGMENTED.

“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe.”—ST. JOHN xiv. 29.

FAITH is the eye of the soul ; the light that enables that eye to see is the Spirit of God. Hope is the telescope through which the opened and illumined eye beholds the things unseen and eternal, bringing the invisible to view, and the distant nigh. It is in proportion as the eye of the soul is strengthened, and as the sight is clear that it becomes piercing and penetrating, so that we behold the things afar off ; it is in such proportion that we shall be weaned from earth and drawn to heaven, and our affections will sit loose on the things of this world, for they will be “fixed above, where true joys are to be found.” We are too apt to stand still in our faith, and we need to be “stirred up,” as St. Paul stirred them up, “by way of remembrance.” Faith is strengthened by experience ; it does not rest in experience, it rests on the simple word of God ; that is the rock on which faith builds ; but there is no other way that faith may be established, strengthened, and augmented, but by experience. The apostle says, “I know in whom I have believed.” He must have believed Christ before he knew Him experimentally ; but *after* he had known him, he says, “I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” He believed ; he knew ; he was assured. This is the legitimate and scriptural way of obtaining full assurance of faith and

hope. We are not to require signs, or wonders, or a voice, or visions, or revelations; we are to rest upon what God has said, and we shall have "the witness" in ourselves "that we have believed" truly on the Son of God. The Redeemer, in His beautiful and pathetic discourse to His believers, addressing them in sweetest solace, and richest sympathy, warned them beforehand of the danger, and told them beforehand of the coming consolation and victory, and He says: "Now, I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe." May God, by His Spirit, enable us so to receive His word that we may believe more and more steadfastly, and attain assurance of faith!

The blessed Redeemer did not mean to say that the apostles had no faith; but He meant to intimate clearly that to strengthen their faith and to increase it, was the great object He had in view. It is clear, therefore, that He attached immense importance to the faith of those who followed Him, and regarded the strengthening of their faith as an object worthy of His deepest interest, and that He spoke, and taught, and wrought miracles largely with that view, that they might believe. Nor does this at all surprise us, for it is according to the law of God's spiritual kingdom, it is according to the principles of the gospel. A man without faith is without the gospel, or might as well be without it—and, perhaps, better, for it does but enhance his guilt. It is perfectly clear that the gospel is nothing to a man if he has not received it in faith. A man naturally blind might as well put his sightless eye to the telescope, as a man spiritually blind look to things in the Word of God. A man stone deaf might as well listen to the preaching of the Word of God, as a man who, having ears hears not, and having a heart understands not; who has closed his eyes, and stopped his ears, and hardened his heart, lest he should see with his eyes, and hear with his ears, and understand with his heart, and he

should believe and be saved. Are there not very many who come, and listen, and hear just in this spirit, just in this state of mind? They have made up their minds not to abandon the world for Christ; they have made up their minds that the sin that most easily besets them shall not be slain; they have made up their minds not to prepare to sacrifice the world and save their souls; they have not any true faith in that thrilling appeal, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" And if men come in this mind, they must necessarily listen with an equivocal and doubtful spirit. The multitude of mankind, even in this Christian land, are living as if believing were a cunningly-devised fable, as if it does not affect them. They come amongst God's people; they listen to the preaching of the word, and the voice of the preacher may be to them "as one that hath a pleasant voice and playeth well upon an instrument;" and yet, though they hear, they believe not; they hear the Word preached, but it does not profit them; and so they cannot enter into the rest of God's people here, or the glorious repose of heaven hereafter, through unbelief. What an awful thing unbelief is, though men make so little and so light of it! It "makes God a liar," and "renders the Word of God of none effect;" it shuts up the springs of mercy, and it shuts out man from the way of approach to Jesus. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." If so, then what must be the sin of unbelief! It is the deadly sin—the final, the fatal sin—the sin that shuts out man from the only Physician that can heal the diseases of the soul, from the only blood that can cleanse his guilt, from the only righteousness in which he may be clothed, "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" or, perhaps, it would be more correctly rendered

from the Greek, "even our Saviour Jesus Christ." Therefore, no marvel that such power and importance should be attached to faith, in the Word of God.

If men say, "Why is it so?" it might suffice to answer, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" But God condescends, in His word, to tell us in some degree why it is that it can only be through faith that a man is saved. It is all of faith, and "not of works, lest any man should boast." It is therefore of faith, that it might be all of grace; so that there is abundant reason for everything the Almighty does. It may be strange to us now, but when we see these things in the light of eternity, we shall see purposes of wisdom and depth in all that God did. This I conceive to be the reason why so much is said about faith, and so much stress is laid on it. Thus we read of "the work of faith," we read of "precious faith," we read of "saving faith," we read of "the faith of God's elect," we read of "the faith that worketh by love," we read of it as the measure of our reception of God's blessing, "if thou canst believe." "Believe only," said Christ to the father who staggered at the death of a child; and to another He said, "If thou canst believe," when he prayed, "Lord, help my unbelief." If He give a man faith, it will be like a grain of mustard seed. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." No marvel then that such importance is attached to faith. How unbelief banks up from a man the waters of salvation; and so it is said of Christ, He could not in His own native city do many mighty works, "because of their unbelief;" and He marvelled at their unbelief, and departed from the place. Yes, the golden pipes conveying the water that comes from the ocean of grace, arise from beneath the throne of God and the Lamb; and if a man comes to these

golden pipes and drinks, he has no thirst. "Open Thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" but if a man closes his mouth, though the water is there, he perishes of thirst; and like the one who lifted up his eyes when in eternal despair, without a drop of water to cool his tongue, man will be obliged to take the blame to himself. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, and buy; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

But it is clear from the passage that, as faith was Christ's special work in His people, and that which He specially wished to be held in view to strengthen and sustain, so it admitted of augmentation and increase. This is asserted clearly in the Word of God, yet there are people who have the presumption to say that faith admits of no increase; they say that when once a man believes he believes, and that there is no augmentation in his faith; but we "have not so learned Christ." We find that faith wavers. Though its foundation is immutable, it is itself mutable. Faith is like a babe; at first it has but little intellectual life, but as it grows up to a child, faith in Christ is augmented and cherished by the pure milk of God's word, and it is sustained and strengthened by the wine of full consolation till the child arrives at manhood; and then from a strong young man it goes on to maturity, and on to hoary-headed faith, when doubt and misgiving seem almost lost in sight. You see that faith admits of fruition—it largely advances and fructuates; and so, St. Paul says, give "diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" and St. Peter says,

“giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.” Faith is like a telescope ; it is still the same, though the glass has become sullied, and soiled, and damped, and dimmed by the breath upon it ; the objects seen through it are uncertain and visionary, but the objects are the same, and the glass is the same, though the lens is darkened, so that a man cannot see the things that are afar off. How much, then, is it of mighty importance that we should seek to have more and more faith ! Christ taught us to pray, “Lord, increase our faith.” The apostles prayed so when beaten down by difficulty and doubt ; they felt, if we have faith we shall do it, and they prayed, “Lord, increase our faith.” Men often pray when they are in difficulties, and trials, and temptations, that God would help them and defend them, and befriend them ; but they do so in a spirit of fear, and too seldom go to the root of the matter, and pray as the apostles did, “Lord, increase our faith.” Let that be increased, and it is done. When you have in your machinery some mightier effort to make you add power, and then it is done ; ∞ faith is the very power of the machinery of the spiritual and moral life. If faith is strong, then a man is “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ;” but if faith is weak, he is like Samson when he betrayed the secret of his strength. When a man is “steadfast through faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity,” he can “so pass the waves of this troublesome world,” that no storm can overwhelm him, and no surge can harm him.

What reason have we then to pray for that most excellent gift of faith, which is the root and source from which this power springs? "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" and all man's doings, even his religion, does not please God, if it is not a service of faith.

Then, brethren, there is a beautiful lesson taught us here, and it is that the experience of God's faithfulness in the promises and prophecies, are admirably fitted to strengthen and augment, and sustain, and assure the faith of the soul. "I have told you before it came to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe." And what is the grand staple of the Word of God? "Exceeding great and precious promises," the beautiful chain of prophetic foreshadowing extending from the creation and the fall down to the consummation of the Christian's redemption, the first link fastened in Paradise, "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," and the successive links concatenated together, and the chain stretching on through the whole of God's revelation, through the whole history of man's connexion with salvation, and at last consummated in heaven. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared," finally and for ever, "for them that love Him." So that, if you begin with the first link in Eden, and trace it through all the successive revelations, through all the promises, through all the prophecies, through all the types and shadows of Christ coming in the flesh, through the wondrous scenes of the life, passion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Saviour; then onward through the history of the Church, through the history of the world in connexion with the Church; trace it too in all the gifts, and works, and experiences of the Spirit of God in the heart; trace it down to the closing scene here, and on to heaven, and you will find a perfect chain. Men think there is not a concatenation of the links together, only

because they see but a portion of its parts, and other parts seem submerged ; but when we see it all, we shall find that not a single link will be wanting. What is the history of the Church ? what was the experience of the early Church ? what has been the history of the Church through all ages, through changes, through darkness, and through apostasy ? what has been the character of wicked men ? what is the history of all nations, as far as we know ? The whole is a mighty commentary on “the sure word of prophecy” and promise ; so that we are witnesses that not one good thing that the Lord our God hath spoken shall fail of being fulfilled, and that not one word that God hath said about the wickedness of man, and about the conduct of man in the rejection of the gospel, not one prediction shall fail of accomplishment ; for “no prophecy is of private interpretation,” it belongs to no particular nation ; it came, “not of the will of man, but of God.”

And, brethren, what a rich source here is of confirmation of faith, what clear and accumulating evidence that God is true ? Infidels have felt it, and staggered at it. I was amazed the other day in considering the new phase of infidelity—if new it can be called, for there is no originality in it ; it is still the old arguments, it is the “evil heart of unbelief” that edits them again, and tries to make them appear plausible, that man may cheat his own soul, and get his conscience dead, and ignore his senses—I was very much struck, I say, with the present phase of infidelity, which largely arises from the perversion of scientific research. Man is discovering many more wonders which show the immutability of nature’s laws, showing more and more how things go on in marvellous continuity, and these things are made use of in endeavouring to catch ignorant and unstable minds ; hence miracles cannot be, prophecies cannot be. The interposition of God, say they, is a thing impossible ; as if the Omnipotent, who made the

law, could not suspend it if it served His own purpose! Surely this is madness, and something marvellous! And yet, in this they are fulfilling the very letter of the Word of God; for the Word of God says, "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts." Do we not see the fulfilment of this in scoffers coming to ground their objections and gibes upon the immutability of God in nature? Yes, this is precisely what is foretold, and shows the truth of what God said as much as believers show it,—not wittingly and willingly, but of necessity, and as a matter of course. It was well said by a Christian lady, who used to worship with us, when she was once pent up in a coach with a man who was scoffing, and who had said, "They talk of miracles, they talk of prophecies and their fulfilment; but they take care that their prophecies are fulfilled and refer to the past: let them show me one that is fulfilling at the present moment:—"Sir," she said, "surely there is one being fulfilled." He said with derision, "What is it?" and she replied, "St. Peter foretold that, in the latter days, scoffers should come." The man, whether convinced or not, was silenced and rebuked, and he held his peace. It is a personal, individual faith that is wanted. Many men say, "I don't deny God—I don't deny the Bible." That may be, but after all they miss the grand point; it is individual faith that saves a man. A man must be brought to say, "God loved me, and gave himself for me." He must not only flee for refuge to "the hope set before him," but he must "lay hold upon the hope set before him;" he must hold that hope in a firm grasp, it must be continually getting increased; he must have a demonstration of that hope in his own experience. "Tribulation worketh experience," with many other things, "and experience hope, that maketh not ashamed." Hope and faith must sustain a man. The poor blind man was established when he said, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And so many

a poor sinner says, "I cannot doubt the promises if they come true to me; I have found them in trouble, in struggles, in sickness, in darkness, to be my joy and peace; and how can I doubt them?" Ah, yes! that, after all, is the most effectual seal of a man's faith, and a man may be getting that assurance continually. He ought to be, and he will be, if he is availing of his privileges, and walking with God.

But more especially God sets to His seal on the bed of sickness, in the anguish of approaching dissolution, in the portals of the valley of "the shadow of death," when it seems as if the curtain is withdrawn, and man faces the realities of the invisible world all alone. As the poet says—

"The chamber where the good man meets his fate
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life, quite in the verge of heaven."

In that hour of solemnity and silence God sets to his seal. He says, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." And we shall be able to say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." When a man can say this, surely he leaves behind him a testimony that all his friends and relatives must treasure up as a blessed confirmation of his faith.

Let me commend to you more the study of the fulfilled promises; study the fulfilment of the past more than even the expectation of the future. I do not say, turn away from unfulfilled prophecy, far from it. We are told they are "blessed" who read and study the book of Revelation, though it was all future at the time it was delivered; but I must say, there has been so much vain speculation and bold presumption, and of prophesying on prophecy, that we ought to study and read with much caution, with much timidity, and with much prayer. Some one has quaintly, but not too strongly said, "There are, alas! many fortune-tellers in the

Church." To be guessing from prophecy is not right. It is not intended that we should antedate God's promises ; we are to keep on the watch-tower and wait in joyful expectation ; but it is not intended that we should forestall the purposes of God. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God ; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children." The study of fulfilled prophecy is most important and most satisfactory, and comes down to the present day, and if there were no other case, that of Jerusalem and the Jews is one of prophecy accomplishing before us day by day.

Therefore, brethren, remember, I beseech you, we ought not to be satisfied with weak and wavering faith. There will come hours of trial and seasons of dread, when we shall need a full, a clear, and a strong faith. We shall need it at the last hour, when "the night cometh when no man can work." Seek that faith, arrive at it in fulness and assurance, then nothing shall shake our confidence in Him who never changes and never fails.





XVIII.

DIVINE AGENCY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.

“Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.—ACTS xvi., part of 14.

GOD brings the sinner to Himself at sundry times and in divers manners. At sundry times :—Some are effectually called and sanctified from the earliest infancy, and from the outward and visible sign of baptism are in deed and in truth regenerated and born of God ; others, in their tender childhood, are drawn gently “with cords of a man,” and “with bands of love ;” others are awakened in their youthful seasons, when the conscience is yet tender, and the Lord takes them out of the vain world, and hides them in His own secret sanctuary ; others, again, are called in mid-day, in the heat of noonday, and then the Lord visits them, and brings them to His home ; others, but comparatively few, are called in old age, in the shades of eventide, when the dawn of the eternal day is about to open upon them. So, in divers manners, does God call sinners to Himself :—Sometimes, as when He visited the prophet with an earthquake and fire, and a great strong voice that rent the rocks ; and sometimes with tender, secret influence and power, He brings them to Himself, as when the dawn visits the world its streaks are scarcely perceptible, but it goes on to the perfect day. These latter cases are amongst the most beautiful, and by many are the least understood. Perhaps the most beautiful specimen of the ordinary working of God's

Spirit, is the one before us. Very simple and lovely it is, and it may well speak instruction, and consolation, and encouragement, to those who are humbly waiting upon God. May the Lord be with us while we open up this beautiful picture of a gradual and secret change of mind.

We cannot but observe how wonderfully God does bring about things that seem the most remote and unlikely; and, in accomplishing His own purpose, He works in one place in order to counterwork that which He is doing in another. He prepares the mind of the messenger, and He prepares the mind of the person to receive the message; as He said Himself, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not." You have a beautiful instance of how He thus works, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. There was a man earnestly following after truth, according to the light he had; he was fully alive to the great things affecting his salvation, and he travelled, though a man in high place and great responsibility, from afar to Jerusalem, that he might learn more about the true God. As he journeyed home, he was observed to study the Word of God, and though he knew not of whom the prophet wrote, he was thus far ready to receive instruction, and God had provided that a messenger of truth should be directed to enter into conversation with him, and take occasion, from the very place of Scripture he was reading, to preach to him Jesus, so that he received the truth, and was baptized in faith, and "went on his way rejoicing." And you have a similar beautiful instance in the case of Cornelius, a devout and earnest man according to his light; he was constant in his alms and his prayers to God, and God prepared his mind thus to receive the truth, and sent an angel to tell him where he should find the messenger to teach him. God might have commissioned the angel to do it, but that is not His order; and so, whilst the Lord was preparing Cornelius to send for the messenger, He was preparing the messenger in Joppa, in order that he might go

to Cornelius and remove his prejudices, and Cornelius believed and was baptized. So it is with the case before us. There was Lydia, a simple and devout servant according to her light. She worshipped God according to her light; though probably she was still unconverted, yet she felt under a deep and earnest conviction, and so God ordered it that Paul should go across to Philippi, in Macedonia. He was directed to go there in a vision, and in that vision there was speaking to him a man of Macedonia,—perhaps an angel assuming the appearance of a man,—and he prayed him saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” They wanted help, therefore, and when he came there and was preaching,—perhaps he heard that there were a number of devout persons who met on the river side on the Sabbath-day to worship God, and the apostle went to them, and preached to them Jesus, through the blood of the Lamb;—and as he was preaching to the little band of worshippers, there was amongst them this “Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.” There it was that the Lord met her, and he opened her heart to attend “unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

Now, we see *what man can do, and what man cannot do*. He can deliver the message of the gospel faithfully. He is not to deliver something else—something to please or gratify the understanding; but he is to determine to “know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” To preach the gospel is the errand on which he is sent, that is his mission from his Master, to whom he must give an account. And “woe to him if he preach not the gospel.” He is to preach the gospel simply and effectually; not in the wisdom of words, lest the people’s faith should “stand in the wisdom of men” and not “in the power of God;” but with all the faithfulness and vitality with which it is set forth by the lively oracles of God. He can endeavour, with all plainness, to bring it home to the hearts of men with power; he can persuade, and try to awaken

the understandings, and interest the minds, and arrest the ears, and arouse the consciences; but, after all, he can only reach the natural mind—he can affect only the natural conscience; he can do no more. It is impossible for him to turn and convert a soul; it is as impossible for him to arouse a soul from trespasses and sins, as it is to arouse the dead from the grave; it is as impossible for him to bring a mind to a genuine, real understanding of living faith, as it is for him to bring down from heaven an angel, or to change the stars from their courses. It is beyond man's power. Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but only God can give the increase. You perceive, then, here, that the blessed result to the heart and life of Lydia was not due to the apostle's preaching; yet the apostle was to preach, and it had its place and purpose in the work of God; but the result was due to the effectual inworking of the Holy Spirit—it was the Lord who opened the heart of Lydia. May you always when you come, come not to listen to man, but to God; not as depending upon human persuasion or eloquence, for if you are depending upon this you are leaning upon an arm of flesh. You must look up to that God who fills His house with His presence to give His blessed Spirit to work inwardly, to open the understanding that we may spiritually understand, to open the heart that we may humbly receive, to break the stone that it may be converted into flesh, and to renew the stubborn, earthly will that it may be conformed to the will of God. There is nothing without, it is all within. "By grace are ye saved;" "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"—"Without me ye can do nothing." And when the Thessalonians turned to God at once, why was it? Because the word came to them "not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Alas! how many in hearing, hear not; and understanding not, believe not; because they look not to Him who alone can make the truth effectual to their souls. The Lord opened the heart. That is,

after all, the grand point. "Give me thy heart," says God to each one of us ; and if the heart is withheld, all is withheld, because the heart is the fountain and spring of all, and as the heart is, so is the state of a man before God. "From within and out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies : these are the things which defile a man," and these come from within, out of the unbelieving heart. This heart is by nature shut against God ; it shuts out Christ, it shuts in sin—it is Satan's stronghold. A man living in sin may flatter himself that all is quiet there, but it is a false tranquillity, that comes from beneath, and not from above ; it is the peace before the thunder-storm's lurid flash, that is broken in by the tremendous tempest ; it is the peace of the palsied or mortified limb. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins ;" and He who searcheth the heart alone can change the heart. It is He who gives a clean heart and a right spirit ; it is He who puts a new spirit into the soul, and causes it to walk in His ways. It is He who does effectually,—oftentimes by a mighty power, and oftentimes by a gentle, and gracious, and tender insinuation,—open the heart to receive the truth, and welcome the message of truth ; so that even if it condemns a man, he welcomes it. It is with him, even as it is with the man who is undergoing some operation that is to rid him of a deadly disease, he welcomes the probing ; and so if the heart is opened to receive salvation, oh, then, it will be willing to receive it as God may be pleased to impart it—to undergo the struggle, and pain, and crucifixion, if it only be for the salvation of the spirit.

Then, in the next place, if the Lord open the heart, *the heart has its own place in opening it*. For if you take an analogous passage, and put it in a clear light, you will see it is the same. Here it is, "the Lord opened ;" and if you go to the epistle to the Laodiceans, you find the Saviour saying to the people of that lukewarm church, "Behold, I stand at the door,

and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." Here you see the beautiful co-operation of man's heart with God's grace. "It is God which worketh" in man to "will and to do of His good pleasure," but He does not take the will and the doing out of our power. He works in you, and you as a consequence "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" so the effect of God's Spirit on the opening of the heart is that the heart itself is opened, it is willing to be opened: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." When God, in the day of His power, works in the heart, then the heart is willing. We cannot too frequently be reminded that we are not blocks, we are not insensible subjects, but we are active and willing agents, and God "works in us." He does not think, will, and act for us; but He trusts us to think, He leaves us to will, He influences us to act. Even so it is with our bodies and souls. Our souls do not act; they do not fulfil what the hands, the eyes, and the feet have to do; but yet all is of the soul. It is the soul that prompts and regulates the acts of the hands and eyes and feet, and they can only act according to its agency and will. And so, by analogy, it is the Spirit of God that is the soul of the soul; but still the soul does not supersede the body, but assists it. It assists our understanding, our memory, our will, our affections, our purposes, our whole moral mechanism, and puts them into play; but He himself is the mighty inworker of the will; it is all of Him, though it is all through us and all by us, for He acts according to our moral nature. This is of great moment; and if people expect certain impulses, if they live in slothful self-indulgent profession, if they expect to be forced to be saved, they never will be. They must be drawn, influenced, led, and made willing; they must look to God, and make an active use of what they look for, instead of slothfully and self-indulgently

resting upon a kind of promise that does not exist in the Word of God, that God will work without them and for them. He will not do so ; He will "work *in us*," and then we shall "will and do."

Then, there is another point. When the heart was opened, you see *the effect of it*. The secret working was only seen by Him who sees the heart. Paul could not see it, the worshippers around could not see it ; but they saw the effect—they saw the result ; for though the working is secret, the result is apparent. She "attended to the things which were spoken." It is a very different thing for a person to attend to the things spoken than to hear them merely. He can scarcely help to hear if he is present,—though some give their minds and thoughts to their pleasures, amusements, relationships, journies, businesses, counting-houses, ledgers, and day-books, when in the house of God,—unless the mind is completely absent, a man cannot help but be hearing ; but how different to such hearing was the hearing of Lydia, when God had opened her heart ! I doubt not she had been earnest in her devotions ; but now she desired peace, knowledge of God in Christ, pardon of her sins ; she desired to know the love of Him she had worshipped, though, perhaps, in blindness ; now, God had opened her heart, and now she yearned after Him. Thou, O God, art the thing I wish ; for my expectation is from thee. "Lord, what wait I for ? my hope is in thee." Thus she attended to the things spoken by Paul. You see here, again, the beautiful harmony and consonance between divine agency and human instrumentality. She did not, because her heart was opened, think there was no need to be taught ; but, on the contrary, she attended with deeper attention ; so the result of the opening of her heart was in beautiful harmony with God's operations. His divine sovereignty does not set aside human instrumentality. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe ;" so that the foolishness of preaching is of Him.

And then, brethren, a further result ought not to be passed by. What was the consequence? In the first place, "she was baptized, and her household." There are persons who would make light of outward forms and ceremonies, but no man will do so who has a desire to obey God in all things. He that has promised to give the inward spirit has appointed the outward sign of baptism. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation;" the one is incomplete without the other. The whole man must be given to God. As we give the heart, we must give the profession of life—the outward seal of admission into the Church, "She was baptized, and her household."

Then, further, we have the beautiful truth of how the heart, when it is opened, embraces others. It is said by the disciple whom Jesus loved, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." People who know nothing more of Christianity than having been baptized and called Christian, have no special love for those they believe to be more righteous than themselves; perhaps they are repulsed by them, and call them righteous overmuch. There is no more truly family feeling than there is in the "household of faith." If we love "Him that begat," we shall love them that are begotten of Him; and if we love our children upon earth, because they are united with us in one family, so much more shall we love the family that is to last for ever—those who are born of one Father; for they are, indeed, endeared to us by ties most enduring, most pure, most sublime, most permanent, most imperishable. They shall love one another for ever; the love they feel on earth is to be perfected in the love that they shall feel in heaven. And so we find that Lydia followed, and constrained the apostles to come and take up their abode in her house, for she loved them. There was the measure of her affection. This is a very clear and striking evidence, where it

is sincere, of a change of mind and nature. We do not love such persons naturally ; they have no particular charm for us ; we are rather repulsed by the idea of them being different from ourselves. " Like loves like." Do you think people who go to the gaming-house and the theatre for their chosen companions would relish those they believe to be spiritually-minded and like to Christ ? No ; they would regard them with contempt and disdain, and they do oftentimes speak of them with ridicule and contempt. There is no fellow-feeling there ; but where there is such a feeling there will be love, delight, and a desire for such communion and fellowship. " He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." There is, therefore, a peculiar evidence of a renewed mind and heart, when people come to love those they formerly did not care for and disliked. It is clear that they have another mind and spirit now ; God has changed their affections—they are more like the great and blessed elder Brother who gives the name to the whole family that are blessed. He who loves Christ will love Christians, because they are Christ's, and for Christ's sake ; not because they are rich, not because they are learned, not because they are accomplished, not because they are pleasant, but because they are Christ's. Whosoever shall give a " cup of cold water" to a disciple, in Christ's name, because he is Christ's, shall in no case lose his reward, because of the motive. A cup of cold water is the least thing one man can give to another ; but the motive is love to the Saviour, and therefore it passes current in heaven.

We know nothing of the after life of Lydia ; but we may be sure that God, who filled her heart with joy and peace and love, did not forsake her. " Faithful is He that calleth you." He which " hath begun a good work" shall continue it to the end—

"The soul that on Jesus has lean'd for repose,
That soul can He ever desert to its foes?
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
He'll never, no never, no never forsake."

He has told us, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man," no nor Satan, nor death, "shall do unto me." "Who shall separate us from the love of God?"

Dear brethren, if your hearts have never been opened to attend earnestly to your soul's salvation, to the gospel of Christ, you have reason to fear you are hearing to little purpose. What is the hearing ear, but as it answers its purpose? And it never answers its purpose unless you are hearing in Spirit, unless you are listening for God to send home His truths to your minds; then, indeed, His truth is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;" then will the incorruptible seed fall into good ground, and bring forth fruit, some sixty-fold, some eighty-fold, and some a hundred-fold,—some less, and some more, but all good fruit that will be found in the record on the day of harvest.

Then, if you have heard and received the truth, remember to whom you owe it. You may be grateful to him who has been, under God, the instrument of conveying the truth to you; you may be grateful for the various instrumentalities and providences that have been useful to you; but you must not have any confidence in man, or ascribe any praise or glory to any but God. What have we that we have not received of God? and if we have received of God, whereof should we boast? It is not, therefore, the arm of flesh, or the power of man, but the arm of God, and the power of the Spirit first and last; and he who has his heart opened to receive the truth, and to feel its love and peace and preciousness, will be ready to say with the Psalmist of old, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name" be the praise and the glory, for ever and ever.



XIX.

GOD'S TESTIMONY TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE.

No. I.

“Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace.”—ACTS xiv. part of 3.

A HEATHEN writer says to his hero, “Do not yield to evils, but face them the more boldly.” If a heathen writer could say so, how much more may the Christian man say to his fellow-Christian, Yield not to disasters or impediments, but march on the more boldly under the standard of grace and the Captain of thy salvation. Another heathen writer makes his hero say, looking to his false gods, “Nothing is to be despaired of whilst thou ledest;” and surely we may say, nothing is to be feared whilst the Captain of our salvation marches before us and leads us. The apostles of Christ, on the occasion to which the verse you have listened to refers, had encountered much opposition and persecution, but they did not as a consequence lower their banner or retire from their post of duty, but for this very reason, “a long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace.” There were not wanting then, and there never will be wanting, faithful servants to bear special witness to the word of God’s grace. This is the point upon which I shall fix your thoughts, and I shall dwell chiefly upon the testimony that God still bears to the word of His grace. In the present day, unhappily, many persons are beginning to speak doubtfully about the testimony of God’s

Word, as if the evidences were weakened by modern discovery, as though men were coming to the conclusion that what the Bible states were very doubtful, or impossible.

Our two points are these: that *the gospel is the word of God's grace*; and that *to the gospel as the word of His grace He has borne, and still bears, special testimony*.—It is the fulness of that testimony upon which I shall chiefly dwell this morning. May God give testimony to the word of His grace, even here, and now in our hearts and consciences, for our salvation and our comfort.

It is a lively picture of the gospel of the word of God's grace, it is the aspect of it which Christ himself left and set before us, it is the aspect of it Satan most tries to cloud and disturb, it is the aspect of it under which it is far too little regarded by most men. The true representation of the gospel is that it is the word of God's grace, the message of mercy, an offer of mercy to a rebel and lost province in an unlimited empire, a message sent to a rebel world. But this is not the point on which we shall chiefly dwell. It is the word of God's grace, because it is the gift of God's grace. Why did the gospel come to us in this favoured land? Just the one solution of it is, of God's free grace alone. The very gospel itself bears that testimony: "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men"—"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Why has it come to us? why do we hear this joyful sound? why do we hear the echoes of the gospel in our own tongue? what made us to differ? It is, as we say so scripturally in the little hymn of our childhood—

"Lord, I ascribe it to Thy grace,
And not to chance, as others do,
That I was born of Christian race,
And not a heathen or a Jew."

"Blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they

hear." It is a great privilege ; would that we esteemed it more. He that is least in the kingdom of heaven under the gospel, has greater advantages and benefits than even the Baptist had, who walked in the dawn of "the day-spring from on high."

It is the word of His grace, because it is the revelation of His grace. What is the very errand and embassage it proclaims? What is it, but to make known that "by grace are ye saved, through faith ; and that not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God?"—"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." God's free, sovereign method of restoration to peace, pardon, holiness, happiness, and heaven, is in harmony with His own perfections, exalting them, and making His glory appear brighter in the reception back of the rebels and apostates to be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." "This is the record," the sum and substance of the revelation, "that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in the Son. He that hath the Son, hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." The gospel is given us in a brief compendium, in one simple sentence—"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Is it not, then, the word of His grace? For what should we know of that grace were it not for that blessed gospel?

It is the word of His grace, too, because it is the record—not merely the revelation, but the chronicle, the history, the delineation, the full development—of the grace of God. Study the Bible with this key, that it is intended gradually and effectually to make known to man the grace of God for the salvation of sinners, then, from the first promise that echoed in the ears of our trembling parents in Paradise down to the last echo of the Book of Revelation, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," you find that there is harmony throughout ;

the key-note of grace sounds through the whole glorious concert ; the whole is true to that one master note. It is grace, grace, grace, from first to last ; and when the top-stone is brought forth, it shall be with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it."

And one point more that glorifies the gospel of the grace of God is, that as it is the great record, so it is the great instrument of grace ; for God works by His gospel ; and it is "the power of God," as St. Paul had proved it throughout his chequered life ; for he says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes." The gospel, then, is the power of God unto salvation ; it is by "the truth, as it is in Jesus," brought home to the heart and understanding, that a man is saved out of guilt, out of corruption, out of the power of Satan, and is brought into the land of liberty, translated from the kingdom of darkness unto the kingdom of light, and from under the power of Satan into the easy yoke of pardon which God gives. The history of the Church proclaims it ; for it has "pleased God by the foolishness of preaching," or the preaching of the gospel, "to save them that believe." And St. Paul says, "We give thanks to God" "without ceasing," that when the gospel came to you, it came not "in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ;" and St. James testifies to the same truth, when he says, "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth ;" and St. Peter bears the same testimony, for he says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever ;" and, therefore, brethren, St. Paul said, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." That grace works through the gospel, whatever the secondary instrument, whether preaching, or in baptism, as a sign and seal of regeneration, the mighty change is the same ; whether the method or instrument, it is the word of His grace ; the Spirit

of grace works by the word of His grace, and if any man is made "wise unto salvation," if any man is sanctified, it is through the truth of the Word of God. Therefore be assured of this, all sound conversion, and true faith in Christ is through the word and by the word; not the word itself but the effectual work of the Spirit by the operation of the word. "By grace are ye saved;" it is all of grace, through the gospel.

But I desire to dwell more especially on this vital point, that the Lord gave testimony to the word of His grace, and that He does so still. If I were to dwell upon the past, it would take me too long. I intend to deal chiefly in the present. Yet I must not pass by the past, because the wisdom of God's Word, the proof and testimony that it *is* the word of His grace, fears not a full, fair, and candid examination. The more we examine, the more it appears to demonstration in a man's mind and conscience that if this is not truth, there is no truth in the world; if this is doubtful, there is no certainty in the universe, but we are plunged and involved in utter darkness and utter perplexity. If this is not the truth, where is the anchor to assure us and the compass to guide us through the waves? We shall be at the mercy of the billows, and be wrecked upon the rocks, as we float into a dark eternity. Every man, therefore, should seek to satisfy his mind, and have it made up, and not have it in darkness; for what a terrible thing it will be to pass into eternity in darkness, as the heathen, who cried, "Oh, my soul, where art thou going?" Should not a man know on this side the shore where his anchor is cast?

God has given testimony to the word of His grace. We must go through the whole volume of evidence if we were to enlarge upon the past. Has He not given testimony to the word of His grace in that wondrous chain of prophecy, that discovery of what was to come upon the world? Who could have conjectured all this? Could any one have in-

vented it, or dreamed about it? If there is anything certain in this world, this is certain; and the more closely you compare with the prophecies of the past the accomplishments down to the present moment, the events of God's providence, and the history of the Church, the more you will find them to dovetail, and answer, and correspond one to another; so that not more beautiful and perfect are the loops in the temple corresponding to the tacks around the tabernacle, so that each loop finds a corresponding tack, until at last a perfect and beautiful tissue is knit together, than are the tacks of prophecy, taking up the loops of accomplishments and the fulfilments of prophecy, and corresponding completely. And the chain is still stretched down, and all is accomplishing. Sometimes, in its course of development, it is dark and mysterious, and, to us, uncertain and hidden, as is natural and necessary in the doings of Him whose "ways are in the great waters," "clouds and darkness are round about Him," but when He has accomplished His purpose, then we shall see that not one jot or tittle of what He has spoken shall fail of fulfilment. The chain is still unbroken, though we may not always see it—as is the case sometimes in a chain across a river, the two ends are visible, but the chain is in the depth of the river, and is concealed from you—but it is not the less knit together because you cannot trace it, and by and by, when the whole is raised, you will perceive that it was as much knitted and perfect as if it were visible, and the whole will form but one chain. It will be so with prophecy. Let me remind you of one prophecy that is accomplishing. What can the sceptic say to the Jew? what does he say to interposition there? How is that nation preserved? Why is there a people without a country, and a country without a people, so that they answer so exactly to the portrait drawn by the pen of prophecy, that if any limner were to sit down now to paint the moral, the

spiritual, the national, and the intellectual character of that people, there is no colour so fitted, no line so true on which to draw their portraiture, as he would find in that prophetic portraiture that has so long presented them to the world? If it is not true, is it not strange that their peculiarities have been stereotyped to the present moment, and stand fulfilled before us? They are a living, speaking witness to the truth of the Bible. And, brethren, I may just remind you of one more point. Study the Church and her divisions, notice the comparatively few who travel the narrow road, and the multitude who travel the broad road, and you will see that they are things that seem to fulfil the Word of God; so much so, that if these things had not occurred, there would have been serious reason to doubt that prophecy was coming to pass, and will come to pass, till every jot and tittle be fulfilled.

But, brethren, the point of all others on which we are anxious to dwell is this: One of the most plausible of the modern objections to the word of God's grace, one of the most popular and most fashionable, the one most in the mouths and on the lips of sceptical and scientific men—and by scientific I do not mean all scientific men, but men who have never studied the Word of God, but have studied only the material and the human, and have confined their views too much to those things seen and felt, losing sight of the great unknown, men who make the creation paramount to the Creator, and nature, as it were, to hide nature's Author—these men are continually telling us that there are such fixed laws in the order and government of the universe, that it is so infallible in the world of nature that there should be no suspension, or interruption, or deviation of those laws, that miracles are impossible, and that they are not realities, but are to impose upon the ignorant and credulous, and that we are called upon to believe what we cannot witness, and

therefore cannot understand. Now, brethren, these miracles were clearly witnessed and recorded ; therefore what must you not doubt if you doubt accumulated and sufficient testimony ? How little you know but on testimony ; and if you set aside honest testimony in one case, you must in all. Then it is answered, and with some plausibility, “ After all, all these signs and wonders that were wrought when God gave testimony, as you say, to the word of His grace, were wrought in times past ; you take care that they are long since ; show us some miracles now.” Now, it appears to me this challenge may be fairly met. If Christians were more what they ought to be, God would show greater things still ; He would show more and more the evidence of His divine power. Surely every reflecting and reasonable man will admit that, as far as mind surpasses matter, the spiritual the physical, the eternal the temporal ; so much further must the mighty power put forth in the mind, in the heart, in the moral constitution, surpass that put forth in the body. Therefore, whether is it the greater miracle, to make the deaf spirit to hear, the dumb spirit to sing, the dead spirit to have life return to it, the mighty power of God to make the soul alive from the sepulchre of sense and sin, or to raise the bodily infirm from the chair of infirmity, and make the palsied rise and the lame walk ? These outward things were the signs and symbols of mightier miracles to be wrought upon man’s immortal nature, upon man’s dead spirit. What was the testimony of Jesus ? He said, “ Ye shall see greater things than these.” And what are greater ? I do not hesitate to say that the conversion of the jailer at Philippi was a mightier miracle than the raising of Lazarus from the dead. I do not hesitate to say that giving the soul liberty from the power of sin, and rescuing it from condemnation and guilt, making it a new creature in Christ Jesus, overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil, raising it to fellowship and

communion with God, to "know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent ;" I do not hesitate to say the miracle of making a man patient under tribulation, rejoicing at the block, triumphing at the rack, and bearing patiently all that hell can prompt and earth can inflict ; I do not hesitate to say, that for a man to be able to praise God with trembling, and to let the streaming eye look up when the dearest earthly objects are torn from us, and to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good ;" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord"—not simply to say it with the lip, but to feel it with the heart ; I do not hesitate to say, that for a poor worm of the dust to be able to meet the king of terrors in calmness and peace, and to be more than conqueror over the last enemy, and to enter heaven in holy joy on the wave that wafts him in ecstasy to the eternal land, are greater acts of power, are a greater putting forth of Divine energy in the soul of man, than the mere energy that makes the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the palsied to rise, the dead to come forth, and the troubled waves of the sea to lie prostrate. But were these miracles confined to the past ? Is the gospel shorn of its power ? Does it lose its energy ? Is God's power restrained ? Is the Spirit of God never at work ? Are there not still signs and wonders ? Could we not take these scornful philosophers who tell us there is nothing wonderful or preternatural now,—could we not take them to objects that must prove the power of God ? Could we not show them the infidel, who has become devout and humble ? Could we not show them the drunkard, who has become sober, and meek, and loving ? Could we not show them the unjust person, the publican, and the harlot, who have become just and pure ? Could we not take them to some who, like Paul, were once oppressors and persecutors, but are now amongst the humblest of the followers of the blessed Jesus ? Are there no such

evidences, both at home and abroad? Have not the cannibals become the gentle disciples of Jesus? Have not the shittah-tree, and the box-tree, and the fir-tree, and the myrtle sprung up in the place of the thorn and the brier? Has not the "wilderness" become "fruitful," and "the solitary place" "glad," by the power of the gospel of God's grace? Can it be denied that there are such evidences? And cannot some of you set to your seals that the gospel has been "the power of God" to your salvation? Have not these been witnesses to the testimony of God's grace, greater than if you saw the dead spring from the grave or the dumb begin to sing?

But we should do great injustice if we did not reserve this for further investigation till evening. Then it may be made very clear that the laws of God's kingdom of grace are as immutable as the laws of the kingdom of nature; and that it is according to the laws of His grace that such results should follow from the adequate cause of the gospel of His grace to which He gives testimony.

Now, a few personal remarks ere we close. You have all of you, more or less, read and heard the gospel; but, brethren, have you received it in its character as the word of grace, as a message sent to you? are you asking, "What must I do to be saved?" It is a necessary question, to teach you the way to peace, to pardon, to holiness, and to heaven. Have you looked upon it in this light? If you have, you must have welcomed it, and been thankful for it. See you do not misrepresent it and disparage it. Then, brethren, if you know the testimony in your own heart, has it been, by the Spirit of God, the germ of a new man in you? feeble it may be, and small in its beginnings, like the grain of mustard seed, but still growing on, the little leaven gradually permeating until it leavens the whole mass of your corrupt nature, and the powers of sin and Satan have been gradually dethroned in you. Have you found that, by

little and little, the Lord is "driving out the Canaanite" from his usurped possession, and is taking the land to himself, and is planting it with the graces of the Spirit, that shall bloom and bear fruit in everlasting life? If you have, you have the proof in yourself; the "Spirit bears witness with your spirit," convincing you of sin, humbling you in the dust, and leading you to the Saviour, to prove that He is almighty to save. Then, brethren, when a man has thus received the grace of God in truth and simplicity, he ought to be able, I might say, to work almost miracles in proof of it; and though you may wish, and not feel able to break a lance with the acute, the critical, or the scientific; if you had all the wisdom, and learning, and logic in the world, you could not so effectually defend the truth as by bearing testimony to the logic of the Bible by the demonstration of a holy, godly, and consistent course, and so living and labouring that men may "take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus." Then, indeed, we might say with the apostle, "Need we epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart;" that whereas you were the blotted volume of Satan, the world, sin, and darkness, you have become the clear and bright shining light, in the truth and the Spirit of God, so that you are new creatures, "Old things are passed away, and all things have become new." Then it may be seen in you that you have the work of God's Spirit effectually in you, "adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things," and Christ may say of you, as God said of His faithful people of old, "Ye are my witnesses." Oh that God may multiply such witnesses! After all, the great im-

pediments the gospel meets with are not from without, but from within ; not so much from the objections of sceptics or of men who find various microscopical defects in the Bible ; but the grand obstacle, after all, is this, that the people who ought to be "the light of the world" are dark, the people who ought to be "the salt of the earth" are savourless. If there were more savour, there would be more purification ; if there were more light, there would be more illumination. Therefore, see to it, that you do not more darken the testimony of God, but bear testimony in silent, quiet, humble witness, in a consistent, holy life, by being patient in sorrow, meek in adversity, enduring persecution, triumphing over the lusts of the flesh and the world, and "adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things."





XX.

GOD'S TESTIMONY TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE.

No. II.

“Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace.”—ACTS xiv. part of 3.

THE word of God's grace. I showed you, this morning, how beautiful its character,—the character of the gospel of the blessed God ; how, understood aright, it is from the first to the last a communication of grace ; it comes from grace, it reveals grace, it recalls grace, it is effectual through grace ; and I sought to show you that God has borne, and still bears, special testimony to this word of His grace. I glanced but briefly at the past, as I desired to dwell rather on the present. It is on the present I desire to dwell again, and to show you what I deem to be of vital moment, that it is to the word of His grace, and *only* to the word of His grace, that He bears living testimony.

It occurred to me, in reflecting upon the subject, that it would be no inapt picture of the world to regard it as a vast hospital, in which all the patients are suffering under various diseases, but all are alike in this—all are dying ; death is the result of the disease in every case if left to man's resources: that in such a dilemma, in the total bankruptcy of human skill and expedients, there comes to this vast hospital of dying men and women a remedy, simple as it appears, yet, in many respects, inexplicable, and so compounded of ingredients that those

who are to take it are not willing to take it just as it is—they wish to resolve it into its primitive elements. But this medicine, to be effectual, must be taken just as it is, according to the simple prescription of the physician who has sent the recipe. When it comes among the patients, they all feel more or less interest in it, though many who are under the vain delusion that their disease is not deadly, make light of it, and disregard it. And too many of the patients who profess to be interested in it, look upon it and examine it, and try to understand it; they say they will not take it unless they can understand it fully, unless they can dissolve it into its first ingredients. Others look at it, and say it is far too simple, and common, and plain a thing, they see no connexion between the medicine and the recovery—it does not at all suit their views; it may be of some avail, but it must be combined and mixed up with a number of ingredients of their own fancy and invention. And there are a few,—though comparatively but few in comparison with the multitude that perish because they either reject or mar the remedy,—who believe in the physician's skill, who receive the specific, and follow closely the prescription, who take it just as it is, desiring neither to add to nor diminish from it, and then it proves of effect, though they cannot tell exactly how; they cannot discover the precise working of the medicine on the constitution, but they are able to say, with the blind man of old, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see;" and with the poor man who was healed of palsy, and took up his bed and walked to his house, "I cannot doubt, for I feel the effect, and know the remedy has cured." Now, the parable is very patent; the medicine is the precious salvation that is by Jesus; the great Physician is the Saviour himself. He has taught us in His Word how to receive the medicine; and if we take it in simple faith, the effect follows. This we know, that it is not with us, or with any man or woman's skill; it is the medicine, through

the power of the Physician. Some men are so fearful and anxious about providing for the things of the present life, and so taken up with the various little concerns of the world, that they disregard the remedy altogether ; they say, How can it affect them ; is there any charm or magic skill in it ? Then there are many others who stumble at the simplicity of the specific. They say it is far too suited to the commonest constitutions, and they seek to combine with it their own ingredients ; they mar it by mangling it, and destroy it by sophisticating it ; then it sometimes aggravates the disease, for while it soothes the patient as an opiate does, it does not give a balm or effect a cure. Then, how many stumble at its mystery ! They say they will not take what they cannot fully understand ; they say they will not take a thing on credit—it must commend itself to their reason ; and they prefer their own expedients, and so they strip away all that is mysterious, and preternatural, and divine, and then they profess to take it ; but in taking away and denying the mystery, they take away its power and divine transcendency. It is simply the patient who takes it as it is, and wishes not to combine with it other things, or takes anything else, but is content to take it in its simplicity, who has faith ; it is simply him who takes it to the saving of his soul. It heals all his diseases, and rids him of all his iniquities, and he knows himself that he is made whole from the plague. He has “ the witness in himself,” having believed on the only begotten Son of God. It is thus the gospel is dealt with amongst those to whom it comes ; it is hence it avails so little to most ; and hence it avails effectually to the few called to receive it, to whom God gives it effectually. Is there not testimony to this in the word of His grace ? Do we want again the blind to receive their sight, the dead to live, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the dumb to speak—do we want these things ? These were but the rudiments, the elements, the alphabet of revelation, intended to indorse it, and to evidence that it was the revelation of God, to

show us that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," then the seal of Omnipotence was put upon the record, and it was made so clear, that "he who runs may read." But what said Jesus, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And what did He accompany this with? A promise of perpetual presence, and therefore energy and power; for He connected it with "Go into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Then, is His presence withdrawn? is His power restrained? has the gospel now less efficacy? God forbid. There have been times when it has worked more manifestly and more marvellously than at others, but it has never been wholly concealed in its power; there has always been a little flock, living monuments of the power of the gospel, temples of the Holy Ghost, raised out of the ruins of man's fallen nature; there have even been beautiful gardens of the Lord planted in the wilderness, "trees of righteousness" have ever flourished on what before was rooted with thorns, and briars, and thistles. This has been the case in the past, and, thank God, it is still so. We could take you to countries where beautiful changes have taken place; we could take you to heathen lands abroad, and show you bright oases in the barren desert. Who called them into being? what caused them to bud and bloom? whence sprang they? How came the mighty change? Is the change in West Africa, and largely in New Zealand, and in many spots in India, less marvellous or miraculous than the feeding of five thousand by means of five loaves and two fishes, or the saying to the stormy deep, "Peace, be still, and there was a great calm;" or saying to the ceremented corpse, "Come forth, and it came forth, bound hand and foot?" Is there not more spiritual manifestation and power of the Spirit upon spirit, of mind upon mind, of the Maker on the creature, in these moral and spiritual changes, than in a physical and material sense took place in the wonders wrought by the apostles and prophets, and by

Christ himself? Those who see it not, cannot admit it; but if they came to their right consciousness they would feel it. It is because they are so carnal, and material, and physical, that they can only judge of what is external, and physical, and tangible. After all, the world of mind,—the world of spirit, mind in its purity and perfection,—is the loftiest world; therefore the operations wrought there, and the revolutions wrought there, are far greater than physical changes. Far more wonderful than the creation of a renewed world out of chaos, is the creation of a spiritual and holy world out of the ruins of the moral and spiritual fall of man. It is that blessed renovation of the soul of man, that restoration of the foe that he may become a friend, of the alien that he may become a child, of the man born in the image of Satan that he shall again shine in the image of God—it is that glorious transforming efficacy and power that bears testimony still to the word of God's grace. Men will admit that in nature, where there is a law of habitual design and action, and a certain course of working, there must be a latent cause. For instance, no man believes that the polarity of the needle explains itself; he knows there must be some hidden principle that rules it. He knows and acknowledges this, he sees there must be a law. And is it not so in the world of spirit, the world of mind? Where there are results, must there not be an adequate cause, an operative cause, an habitual cause? Now, in these moral miracles, when the truth is received in love and power, there must be an adequate cause, there must be a reason for it. Can human reason, or philosophy, or education produce it? will discipline or training? Is there any power in human beings to do this? For years society has tried its best to no purpose with some who have still been left as the poor demoniac, naked, and cutting himself, and crying aloud; and some of these individuals have, under the power of the gospel of Christ, applied by the Spirit to their hearts and minds, become new men. When

society had felt utterly powerless and bankrupt in resources and endeavours, these men have been found, by the simple word of Christ, sitting clothed, and in their right minds, at the feet of Jesus. Who has wrought this? whence did it come? The mere telling of certain simple truths, the mere appealing to the consciences and hearts—is there any power in this adequate to produce the result? What is talking to man, and pleading with man, and telling a man that God has loved him, and wishes to save him—what is there in all this to touch him? But there is the fact. How has it come to pass? what has wrought it? It is the Lord giving testimony to the word of His grace. We may well say, in such cases, this is “the finger of God,” and is not wrought by man. We are born again, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” And if the communication of natural life is beyond the power of man or any creature, is not the communication of spiritual life still more beyond the power of the creature? Is it not the inalienable prerogative and power of God? Then, brethren, here are facts, let our geologists, and ethnologists, and geometricians account for them as they will. They tell us that the things they plead as in arrest of the miracles of Scripture cannot be denied, that they are facts. But *here* are facts, how do you account for *them*? whence this secret law? whence this power? If yours are facts, they do not affect our facts; and, therefore, your facts, however they may stumble you, do not stumble us; because, in the first place, we believe they will prove to be no facts at all, if they gainsay the testimony of Scripture; and, next, that the Scripture will at last show that they are not facts, or that your conception of them was wrong that made them appear dissonant with the testimony of Scripture. The moral miracles we point to present testimony and demonstration of our facts. A lie, a dream, infatuation, imposture, ignorantly foisted fables, could not do this. There must be an adequate cause. What

is that cause, but God bearing testimony to the word of His grace? He makes it effectual, and therefore "we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Ah, brethren, and it makes it all the more striking that those called are not the very learned, the intellectual, or the great; it makes it all the more evidently the power of God. For what says the scripture? "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence." For it is of Himself, it is of his own grace, the Lord bears testimony.

We might pursue this course of illustration longer, but time will not permit. We must offer a few remarks upon what we consider to be a collateral branch of the subject, and one of very deep import. It is this; that God bears patient testimony to the word of His grace, and *only* to the word of His grace. It is natural that He should be jealous of His own blessed specific—jealous lest it should be either marred or corrupted by human traditions, or emasculated, or macerated by man's vain and subtle explaining it away, or destroying its miraculous nature. It is natural that it should be so. Look at the whole history of the Church and the gospel, and the more you study it, the more you will come to this conclusion, that however in name it may have been acknowledged, however it may have given its character and name to certain forms and systems that were not fundamentally the gospel of the grace of God, however men have tried to preach their own

particular views, without giving the gospel in its simplicity and fulness, they have failed to receive the testimony of the grace of God for saving sinners, for comforting, and sanctifying, and edifying the saints, for preparing and building up a people for the Lord. Wherever the simple grace of God has been set aside by self righteousness on the one hand,—as it is largely by the Church of Rome,—or, on the other hand, its mysterious and miraculous character denied by those who deny the divinity of Christ and the efficacy of the atonement, there may have been some moral influence,—as there often is largely,—there may have been much earnestness, and much natural devotion, and self-denial, and outward and external conformity ; but where has been the living union of the Spirit with the Father of spirits in Christ Jesus? where has been the transference of the soul out of darkness into light, from under the iron yoke of Satan to the blessed and easy yoke of Jesus? where has been the complete and moral transformation and submission to the truth? where are the results that show the new creature? In the missions of the Church of Rome to the heathen, where there has been little of the gospel of grace, where are the trophies of new creatures? where are the converts? And amongst modern philosophers, where are the little gardens in the deserts to point to, and of which they can say “there is the testimony to our efforts?” Brethren, is there any power in this world of ours that can compete for one moment in moral and spiritual results with the simple gospel of the grace of God? Why, what was it that shook the Roman empire, and brought its mighty fabric of idolatry to the dust? What was it that elevated upon the ruins of mankind the beautiful bands of the sheep of Christ, that have been gathered together in all ages, that knew His voice and followed Him? What was it that at the Reformation rolled away the thick clouds which had crept over the visible church so long? What was the mighty agency, but the coming forth of the gospel of the grace of God,

the preaching of "Christ, and Him crucified." It was grace—grace was the theme of the apostles, grace was the sound of our Reformers, grace was the testimony of dying martyrs who sealed the gospel of the grace of God with their blood, and they consented for it to endure tortures, agonies, and persecution, and with one voice proclaimed that God bears testimony to the word of His grace. We have only to look back on the history of our own country, and of our own Church within our own days. Take a parish, take a pulpit where something is preached that is not contrary to the gospel,—and perhaps in some sort is a part of the gospel,—but where the gospel in its simplicity and purity is not preached. Is there vital religion there? are there sound conversions there? are there drunkards made sober? are there impure men made chaste? are there churls made liberal? are there worldly-minded who have become spiritually-minded? are there those who were "lovers of pleasure," who have become "lovers of God?" are there those who were "high-minded, blasphemers, heady, traitors," who have become new creatures, and who show in their spirit, and walk, and conversation, that "old things are passed away," and that "all things are become new?" I am bold to say there are not. There may be moral influence for good, by the reading of God's own Word in the beautiful services of our Church, that we love specially because she provides so much of God's simple Word to be publicly read and proclaimed,—God may by these means gather out a faithful remnant, but still it is when the gospel comes in power to a city, to a congregation, to a parish, when the gospel of the grace of God is fully proclaimed, that it is in some degree, as it was in old time, when we are told there was great joy in the city, when many believed, and it was said, "These men have turned the world upside down," and when we read that those who practised curious arts, the magicians and charmers, "brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and

found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." Yes, brethren ; are not these the evidences that God bears testimony,—not to the law simply, not to the precepts of morality simply, not to forms of church government and ceremonies simply, not to man's views and ideas and notions of the gospel, not to a gospel which is another gospel,—but to the gospel of which the apostle says, "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel," "let him be accursed," that gospel of which he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," God bears testimony to it that it is His power unto salvation.

But, brethren, I hasten to add a few words of application. Let us not forget, I pray you, as I said this morning, that it is in the power of the humblest and plainest man or woman, the least intellectual, learned, acute, and critical amongst us, to give one of the very best evidences of the power of the gospel that ever was, or ever can be given, by leading a holy and godly life, by following in the footsteps of Christ ; for if you have the candle lighted by the Sun of Righteousness, it it is not to be put out of sight, or under the bed, but on a candlestick. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven ;" for God is glorified when testimony is borne to the word of His grace, and men take knowledge of those who profess Christ's name, that they have been with Christ, that they have got somewhat of His Spirit, that they have learned somewhat of His beautiful example. Then, you see, here is a very plain evidence that any of you may get, if you are doubtful or unsettled in your minds. "He that hath believed on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." Follow on to see if God will not bear testimony to the word of his grace in your consciences, and hearts, and minds, and so in the end bring you

to such a happy change, that you may say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see;" whereas I was before diseased, I am now healed; whereas before I could not resist temptation, but followed my own passions and tempers, and went like a bullock to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks, now I am able to make a stand against them, and to master my temper, and restrain my tongue, dethrone my secret passions and evil appetites, and to say to them, "thus far shalt thou come, and no farther." I can do all that, yet "not unto me, but to His name be all the praise," as the Psalmist said, for all is of the grace of God. Is not that evidence? Are these the mere delusions of a man's fancy? Is this mere blind enthusiasm? No, brethren; if there is reality in the world, there is reality in the change in such a man, from being a condemned criminal, to being renewed and adopted in Christ. Be very jealous, then, for the simplicity and purity of the gospel of Christ. Be assured of it, to nothing else will God give testimony in saving souls; and, therefore, enthusiasm, formalism, church ceremonies, will not do; the skill of philosophers and mere essays will not do; mere vain theories of man's perfectibility will not do. I wonder what these advocates of man's perfection in himself think of what is now going on in America. Look at its state and condition. It has gone forward and made wonderful strides, and now the land is one vast hospital, and the fine theories men have spun have been swept away by a blast, like the web of the gossamer in the wind! "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Can any remedy reach that? Is there aught in nature to reach it? Nothing but the preternatural can reach it, and that is the grace of God. Therefore we should be very jealous for the maintenance of the gospel. Many in these days have got what they consider the old form; many are looking after some fresh form and mode of worship and its accompaniments;

many want to worship something more philosophical, and scientific, and profound, as they deem. May it be ours to resolve with the apostle, "I am determined not to know anything among you,"—and yours to know nothing in your religion, in your sicknesses, in your sorrows, in death, and in judgment,—“ save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”





XXI.

SELF-IGNORANCE: ITS INEXCUSABLENESS.

Know ye not your own selves?"—2 Cor. xiii. part of 5.

It was a wise saying for a heathen philosopher, which one of the seven wise men of Greece has recorded as his special aphorism, "Man, know thyself;" and it is well paraphrased by one of our own Christian poets—

"Know thyself,
All wisdom centres there."

Until a man knows himself, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know ; he cannot know his Saviour aright, he cannot know his own duty, and happiness and hope aright. A stranger to himself, he must be a stranger to solid peace, and abiding satisfaction, and true rest for his soul. And yet there is perhaps no one duty which men are more averse from, and at which men more shrink, and to which they are more utterly inapt, than the study of themselves. The apostle takes it for granted that Christian people do study themselves, or else he would not say in the pointed language before us, "Know ye not your own selves?" Are ye so ignorant, are ye so blind, are ye so utterly hopeless, as not to know yourselves? Nevertheless there are very, very many who call themselves Christian, and fancy themselves to be saved, and look forward to eternity with little or no apprehension, and

are perhaps scarcely looking forward to it at all, and of whom it must be said, "Alas ! you know not your own selves."

Having been much impressed with this most important subject, I shall call your attention this morning to *the inexcusableness*, and to *some of the causes and reasons of self-ignorance* amongst nominal Christians, and afterwards I shall seek to show you *the guilt, and folly and peril of self-ignorance*. The whole is too comprehensive to be embraced in a single discourse, we shall therefore take only the former part this morning. May that Spirit, that alone can open our eyes to know ourselves and our hope in Christ, vouchsafe His divine illumination, and convincing power, that we may not hear in vain.

It will not be needful to enlarge at any great length upon the commonness of self-ignorance. It is too obvious to need proof. Most men will admit it with regard to others, if they will not with regard to themselves. To take the lowest kind of self-ignorance,—how ignorant men are of their mental powers ! Men are continually thinking themselves distinguished for the very opposite faculty to the one for which they are distinguished. They often suppose that they possess a power of mind they do not possess, and they will set to studying calculations when they have no calculating powers, they will enter into foolish speculations for which they have no adaptation, no capacity, no fitness. Even to take so low a view of things as man's natural abilities, in a thousand different ways how many play the fool, and expose themselves to just censure and ridicule ? Why is this ? Because they are so ignorant of their own minds. This is a small matter ; it involves, at the most, mistakes of a temporary nature, and this is not the self-ignorance of which the apostle was speaking ; it is not the self-ignorance he guards professing Christians against ; that is an ignorance of the soul's moral character, a man's ignorance of his marvellous inner powers, which we more frequently designate the heart—but, more strictly speak-

ing, the study of the soul, that marvellous, separate, spiritual being a man has encased within him, but not identical with his intellectual being. It is his state and moral character before God, that which a man has when he goes naked into eternity, *that* is what the apostle means here when he says, "Know ye not your own selves?" Now, it is a very common thing for men not to know themselves. We see continually how people are confident of salvation who have no pretence to it; how continually people are indignant if you tell them of some fault as visible as the light that shines upon them to others, yet they are so ignorant of themselves that they will not listen to you if you try to convince them of their fault. Try to convince the sensual man of his indulgence, and how blind he is; try to talk to the drunkard of his horrible habit, and how blind he will be; try to convince the impure man of his loathsomeness, and he is utterly blind. Such men will attempt to excuse themselves, and hide themselves from others, and so it is continually that men impose upon themselves. What a delusion men are under—how men are startled when they awake up and find it has been a dream! Their house has been kept in quietness, and their goods in peace, because a strong man armed possessed it; but when a stronger than he comes upon them, and overcomes them, he taketh away all the armour wherein they trusted. They think the Spirit of God dwells in them, when it is the spirit of darkness. There are few that would deny our proneness to ignorance of our besetting sin; but of our actual condition before God, our ground of hope of acceptance in Christ, of reconciliation by his blood, of renewal in the Divine image, of our enjoyment and possession of eternal life—what false grounds of presumption! How inexcusable is that ignorance! Many really talented and intelligent men, well acquainted with other things, know nothing of this. It has been said,

"The proper study of mankind is man."

Next to a knowledge of God in Christ, a knowledge of a man's own self is all-important ; and the man only knows himself aright who knows himself in the light of God ; and it is only in proportion as man has the light of God, and the knowledge of God in Christ, shining in his heart, that he begins to know which is "deceitful above all things." Can anything concern a man so much as himself? for, as we had it this morning in the lesson, of what advantage is it, if a man "gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" His soul is that which concerns him most; and if he gives so much attention and study to anything else, what advantage will he gain? It is here to-day, and may be gone to-morrow. All that a man has may go, and will go ; but man himself will remain in his naked essence for ever. It is not what a man is, but what he will be. If he be poor or rich, if he be ignorant or learned, if he be unsuccessful or successful, if he be favoured or reproached, man is still that secret awful being that goes out of this world, and enters upon a dread being that is to last for ever. Surely, then, a man ought, of all things, at least to know himself ; and until he knows his spiritual condition in the sight of God, he does not know himself. A man may become an acute metaphysician, he may become a very apt detector of the wants of the human frame, he may be acquainted with all the maladies a man is troubled with, and with all his ailments, but, after all, if he knows his own body, and frame, and his mental faculties, and how to put them to the best account, and improve them, and cultivate them,—if he know all these things, and yet know not that which will survive them all, that which is of more worth than them all, that which alone is of much importance,—surely if a man is not alive to *that*, if he does not look into *that*, if he does not study *that*, if he does not examine *that*, he is but a fool to himself, and is inexcusable. The poorest and most ignorant should take time to study themselves, and

examine themselves, and see how they stand in the sight of God, and be acquainted with the ground of their hope, and be assured that it is not a lie, that it is not a delusion that will make them ashamed, but that they are growing in grace and in earnest conformity to Christ, and meetness for His coming. How inexcusable is a man if he does not study himself, because it is a study open to every man, it is obvious to every man. Men do not begrudge time for the study of the mental faculties, for the study of physical causes and effects; men have time for the study of these things, and they will go into distant lands and roam over the world in the pursuit of mere outward and secular knowledge. But a knowledge of a man's self, a study of himself, only requires that he should look into himself; he has no distant land to go to, the little world within him contains the great subject of research; it does not require great labour to reach it; it does not require learned books—the mysterious leaves of the book of life and death are within him, and he has only to close his eyes and retire into the secret chambers of his own mysterious being, to commune with himself, and examine himself, and prove his own self, and see what his own conscience reports, and says, and decides, that he may grow very apt and very wise in these things. Many a poor humble Christian who knows no language but his native language—and perhaps cannot even read that—many a man who has never heard of metaphysics, and knows nothing of the deepest studies of philosophers, yet could show them their utter ignorance. When they come to consider the moral state of their own hearts, they know nothing of it; they have not discernment to know themselves; they are not accustomed to study themselves. It is a study needful to every one, and it is not difficult to any one who asks for light. It is not that a man has not the means or the power to do it, it is that he has not the inclination—man allows his heart to deceive him. Surely it is

inexcusable for a man not to know himself—not to study himself. Why has God given reason? why has He given imagination? why has He given memory, but to be used for their proper purposes, and to be directed to their proper ends? Why was that wonderful power of conscience given to man, but for the purpose of self-knowledge? And then, if man does not use his conscience, that marvellous power of reflection, he is an unprofitable servant, he is an unfaithful steward. Is he not so? To use only what concerns these threescore years and ten, and neglect the boundless state of being that must exist throughout eternity—to give so much attention to indulgence and pleasure, and to be ignorant of the science of salvation, and of the concerns of immortality—can any man justify *that*? Must it not be said, he is an unprofitable servant, and an unfaithful steward? May it not, therefore, be said of Christian men especially, “Know ye not your own selves?” Ah! brethren, it is sad to think how unspeakably neglectful of this state of the inward heart so many are.

I am anxious to examine into the cause of this—to inquire how it comes to pass, that while we have such facilities for self-examination, while such opportunities are given for its accomplishment, men are so infatuated. I can only touch this morning upon one of such causes. The first great reason is, that men are so engrossed with the things about them, with vain pleasures, with the pursuits of business, with “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” that they neglect themselves and their mortal being; they are all so absorbed in those things that press on their senses, and come home to them, and interest them, because they are palpable and perceptible; men are so busy abroad that they have no time for home, and the fireside within them is utterly neglected. All their attention is occupied with the world beyond them, and the microcosm of their own being is over-

looked, and slighted, and forgotten. How very many there are who go on from infancy to mid-life, and from mid-life to old age, and they have not time for that for which time was given! And yet that is commonly the case, especially in these days of high pressure; men of business are occupied so much in their counting-houses, in their mills, in their shops, with their mechanism; they are so absorbed often that they will give days and nights to these external things, and yet, if they are asked to look into themselves, if they are asked to kneel down to ask God to make them acquainted with themselves, they have no time! Oh! the truth is, that they have no inclination for it. They are fully alive to the things "seen and temporal," but they are dead to the things "unseen and eternal." They want faith to bring home in power and demonstration a man's inner being, and they have not that faith. Surely it is important that they should come to a knowledge and conviction that they have it not. How many men assent to the truth—they acquiesce in it, but they are not awake to their real condition, they have no sense of their danger. They want arousing, not merely to acknowledge the truth, but to realize it, and feel it, and enjoy it, and be happy in it—living by it and living for it. Therefore, how much it is needed that people should abstract themselves from this world. Young people, how much they think of dress, of appearance, of admiration! paltry, pitiful, wretched pursuits for mortal immortals, when they should be seeking to reach to purity and glory and honour for ever and ever. Then, brethren, how many are taken up with worldly studies! how earnest they are in getting prizes, and in distinguishing themselves, how earnest they are in the pursuit of intellectual studies; but, after all, if a man does not know himself, he is a mere child in the primer of learning,—if he does not know something about that great and solemn volume within him that will be spread open in the great day, to test and determine whether

he shall enjoy glory, honour, and immortality, or shame, confusion, darkness, and despair for ever and ever. That I take to be the first,—perhaps the chiefest,—reason why men are so unacquainted with themselves, and why they live on year after year filling themselves with delusion, and so never awake to know themselves, never enter into themselves to study themselves.

The subject, you see, opens upon us ; but we must pause here. Recollect, that sooner or later we must all know ourselves ; and though a man may live in delusion, he cannot die in delusion. The moment a man enters into the light of eternity, his delusion is passed for ever. If it will stand in death, then we shall not mind ; but if it shall not stand in death, then it will not, and it ought not, to stand in life. Better for man to come to some conclusion, “I am right, or I am wrong,” than to rest upon poor uncertain guess work, and then to awake when it is too late, and will not avail. God grant that we may be found thinking of ourselves, daily examining ourselves with the eye of an enlightened conscience, so that we may be able to read in that conscience what will be the decision in the great day !

Dear brethren, let us not forget, that so prone are we to self-delusion, that we must fly for refuge to the Spirit of God to teach us and to enlighten us ; and we must pray to God, “Search me, O God, and know my heart : examine me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” That is a beautiful passage, “He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” If a man wants to prove himself good, and holy, and happy, and ready for eternity, then a man will come to the light. See to it that you have not “a lie in your right hand.” And be assured of this, you must desire to know the truth. Do not seek to make out a good case in order

to flatter yourselves, do not set about finding excuses, do not play the fool with yourselves, do not desire that Satan should impress upon you that your own heart is right enough ; you should pray that God the Saviour may be impressed upon your hearts, and you should desire to have the truth within you. Surely it is in vain for a man to shrink from it ; surely a man should be anxious to know himself ; surely it is a man's wisdom and happiness to come to a right knowledge of himself—to have a right, and calm, and peaceful hope and confidence. “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God ;” and, therefore we should desire to know, as He knows, in order that we may be prepared to meet the great eye of Omnipotence, and be washed in the blood that “cleanseth from all sin,” and be “renewed in the spirit of our minds,” and dwell with Him for ever and ever.





XXII.

SELF-IGNORANCE: ITS CAUSES.

“Know ye not you own selves?”—2 COR. xiii. part of 5.

IN the former epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul says “For some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” And how truly it may be said that there are some that have no knowledge of themselves; I speak this to your shame; for next to a knowledge of Him that made us, surely a knowledge of ourselves, whom He made, is important. If the former concerns us eternally, the latter concerns us eternally too; for as we have to do with God, so we shall have to do with ourselves for ever and for ever; and whilst a man lives, he must himself be the centre of his heaven or of his hell, of his misery or of his blessedness. The subject on which I fastened my thoughts last Sunday morning, and to which I desire your further attention this morning, falls in seasonably with that holy supper to which you are invited, for the special direction given by the Spirit of God in regard to the Lord’s Supper is, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup;” and so again He says, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” “Judge,” in the first use of the word, then, means to come to a conclusion and decision about our own state; and “judge,” in the latter use of the word, is condemned, blamed by the Lord; and, not to be condemned by the Lord, we are to come to a conclusion and right judgment about ourselves, and to eat of that

bread and drink of that cup. I dwelt last Sunday morning upon the inexcusableness of not knowing ourselves, and upon the importance of knowing ourselves; I endeavoured then to show you some of the reasons why men are so indisposed to know themselves, and why they are so commonly guilty of self-ignorance, and I indicated that I would follow up the subject, and show the folly and guilt and peril of self-ignorance. I have to notice further reasons why men are indisposed to know, and are so prone to be ignorant of themselves, and this will probably occupy what time we can spare this morning; if so, I shall reserve the latter part of the subject to another Sunday morning, being unwilling to do injustice to the subject which, I trust, is not without its solemn lesson to us all—a subject which in this day of easy and lax profession is doubly important—a subject which, because of its distastefulness to men, is, therefore, the more solemn and momentous. May the Spirit of God be with us, and lead us into the chambers of our hearts, and make us acquainted with ourselves in some degree as God is acquainted with us.

A further reason why men are so ignorant of themselves is, that the changes in themselves, the changes from bad to worse, their acts, passions, emotions, and fixed habits of evil, steal upon them so insensibly, and so gradually, that they are “tied and bound with the chain of their sins,” ere they are aware of it, and alive to it. When the strong man armed keeps his house, his goods are at peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour, wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. And as the fabled vampire is said to fan with its wings the poor slumbering victim, while it drinks its life-blood, soothing him in a deep slumber while it is depriving him of life, even so the great enemy of souls seeks to destroy us. He keeps the house in peace, and fans his victims with false hopes and expectations, while he secures them in eternal death. It is so smooth,

and so easy is the ignorance of a man, if he is unguardful of himself, that he never suspects how wrong he is, that he is so bent upon evil and so averse to good, so at enmity with God, as God is revealed in His Word,—he never suspects it until something arouses him and stops him in his course ; nay, a man is not aware of the strength of the principle of evil acts until he comes to strive and struggle with them. I remember, while in Switzerland, just behind the hotel where, for a season, I was sojourning, a beautiful river ran so swiftly and so rapidly, that it was at times difficult for the eye to keep pace with the stream flowing along, and so even was the channel, and so green and beautiful were the banks, that you could hardly imagine that the water was going along rapidly. But by and by it encountered a rock in its descent and fall, and then you heard, by the roar it made, and saw by the foam that covered it, with what strength and swiftness it was rushing along like a flood, and that it only wanted something to oppose it, it only wanted the stone in its way, to disclose the strength and rapidity of its current. And is it not so, as I thought at the time, with the evil current in man's inward heart? does it not flow on smoothly and rapidly, and a man never suspects how rapidly it is carrying him down? but only let him put some obstacle in its way for it to struggle against, and to turn it a little, and he finds that what appeared to be running gently, is swift, and it dashes against the impediment ; then he will find how strongly the stream will oppose his attempt to gain power ; then a man will be aroused, and he will be startled to find how far he has gone wrong, in pride, in self, in worldliness, in sensuality and love of pleasure. Ah! brethren, though a man may not be alive to the strength of the evil habits within him, though he flatter himself with the idea that he can turn the stream, and alter the fearful force of folly, and the habits of indulgence that are gaining strength upon him day by day, the iron is hardening into steel.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.” It is plain, therefore, if a man is to set about it, and try to remedy this, he will find that with men it is impossible; but as Jesus said, blessed be His name, “With God all things are possible;” therefore it is possible for the sinner, if he is as the Ethiopian, to be changed by the mighty power of God.

Another chief reason why men are unacquainted with themselves, and are so much strangers to themselves, and are so ignorant of themselves, is, that for the most part they find it so repulsive, and startling, and distasteful a vision. They do not look upon a well-ordered landscape, where all is peace and tranquillity, where all is beautiful and chaste, where the flowers of Paradise are blooming, where the fruits of heaven are ripening; but, instead of that, when they catch a glimpse of themselves in the light of heaven, they find a great deal that makes them ashamed, it alarms them, it disturbs them, it disquiets them, and like the sluggard on his bed who is aroused by some unpleasant dream, as soon as it is gone he falls to sleep again into deeper repose, after struggling for a moment, he turns on his bed and again slumbers, and a deep sleep follows. We are naturally prone—it is natural that we should be—to be guided by inclination; and where the heart is, there the inclination will be. As a general rule, the natural inclination has to be resisted and overcome, and it is then another inclination that has to be followed by us; for “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary, the one to the other.” Hence the inclination shrinks from what disturbs a man, and from what is unpleasant to him. You must often have felt, when listening to the preaching of the word of God, when the minister comes home to your own heart’s sin, and indicates that which is the idol of your hearts, that you dislike it, and shrink from it, and wish he was not

so faithful, or, at least, that he would deal with some other case than yours. What does this show? That you do not wish to know yourselves, that you shrink from the dissecting knife. Do not people very often in sickness, in sorrow, when standing at the grave side, when death is forced upon their reluctant thoughts, tremble before the great fact, and they are deterred? They begin to think and reflect, and they find all is wrong in them. A thousand sins of neglect flash upon them and start up before their faces, and like one who has had some dreadful disease, as small-pox, and has become scarred and disfigured, when they catch a glance in the mirror, and see their faces, they start back and shrink from the view, and they shun the mirror, because it reflects themselves. Is it not so when many view their own souls in the mirror of God's Word, and an awakening flashes over them, and it does not reflect what gives them pleasure? They are ready to dash the mirror from them, and to say, "It is false;" and to say, as the king of Israel did to the true prophet of old, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." They are ready to say as the Israelites did to the false prophets, "Prophesy smooth things unto us." And so, with many, they say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Oh, dear brethren, what false prophets we are by ourselves; how we try to make up peace for ourselves how we build our house upon a quagmire, and because the ground serves for a little while to support us, we forget that there is no rock underneath, and by and by, when the winds come, and the rains descend, the wood and the clay structure tumbles down and is absorbed in the quagmire on which we so foolishly and complacently tried to rest. I believe one great reason why many Christian men, who have the name and not the nature; many who are hypocrites, who deceive others, and perhaps themselves; many who are living careless, ungodly lives, yet conform, to a certain extent, to religious observances, are so un-

acquainted with themselves, and therefore, so far from returning to God, is this kind of dread and dislike to see themselves as they really are ; notwithstanding, brethren, that this cannot be wisdom. Does a man do so in his worldly affairs ? Does he play the fool so, or gloss over his affairs in his mercantile establishment ? If anything occurs which causes you to suspect the fidelity of one upon whom you depend, do you, because it is painful to yourself, and you do not like to find to what extent matters have gone wrong, therefore close up your books, and make the best of it ? No, verily ; you at once set to work to find out the defalcation, and the extent of the delinquency, and put a stop to it. And if you have a fraudulent dependant that would be independent in your own breast, betraying you, and giving you a false account, and a misrepresentation of the state of your affairs before God and eternity, are you to smooth it over ? are you to allow him to go on defrauding and beguiling you—are you to gild over the delusion ? To do so is not only an unwise, but surely a most unsound thing ? Can it last ? will it last ? will it not come out ? If God would take your own judgment of yourself, and never test it, it might do indeed ; but “judge ye your own selves, that ye be not judged of the Lord,” is the language of Scripture, and the language of our scriptural Church.

Another reason why people are so self-ignorant, and why they, to a great extent, wish to have it so—why they allow it, and why they like to have it so—is that just in proportion as men get more drawn off the right, and accustomed to the wrong, in just such proportion their conscience loses its sense of right and wrong, they become more and more inwardly darkened ; and consequently, “if the light that is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness ?” If the very conscience, that should know and judge a man’s inward state, is itself bad, will it not give a false judgment, and a wrong verdict ? if the standard is brought down to the conduct instead of bringing the conduct

to the standard ; if the judge is bribed and the law is relaxed, and accommodated to suit man's inclination, instead of our testing ourselves by the unwarped law of God, and listening to the voice of conscience as the voice of God's vicegerent within us, and wishing to know how it approves us, of how it decides upon us ? And then, indeed, it follows, and must follow, that people will get still worse, because the standard has got disturbed ; the very light that should reveal themselves to themselves is dimmed and forgotten ; the very judge that ought to come to the conclusion about them is prejudged and bribed, and gives a false decision upon false testimony. Hence it is that many a man gets wrong ; and, alas ! man cannot perceive that he is wrong. Many must have found that in proportion as a man goes wrong, he does not arise and return to his Father, but he gets steeled, and sealed, and stupefied by the opium of sin, and his conscience seems not to upbraid him ; as it is so awfully said in Scripture, their very "conscience is defiled." What an awful thought, that the little that is good in them becomes bad ! How is a man to know himself, if "the candle of the Lord" within him is put out, if the very conscience is prostrated, if "the light that is in him be darkness ?"

Then, brethren, once more : Men do not like to know themselves, and come to a right judgment, because they think there is time enough yet ; by and by they will attend to it. Is *that* the time when a man should wish to make the awful and startling discovery that he has "a lie in his right hand ?" No, brethren ; surely it is for man's happiness in time, as well as peace in death, that he should wish to know "in whom he has believed." If there were "no balm in Gilead," if there were "no physician there," if there were no help for the helpless, if there were no hope for the hopeless ; then, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die ;" then, do not torment a man before the time ; then, do not ante-date and

anticipate his ruin ; then, do not arouse him out of his pleasant dream, since it is all that he shall have, for he has no help and no hope ! ‘ Ah ! brethren, when there *is* a “ hope that maketh not ashamed ;” when there *is* a refuge for the lost ; when there *is* one that looks out upon the returning prodigal afar off, and is ready to say, “ This my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found ;” are we dealing fairly with ourselves in not seeking to know if it be well with us ? The sooner we know, then, the better, whether it be peace with us or not. “ Now is the accepted time ; behold now is the day of salvation.”

But this will come before us for consideration more under the guilt and the awful peril of abiding in self-ignorance, and being wilfully deceived by ourselves. I will, therefore, pause and apply the subject to ourselves as far as it has gone.

You see, brethren, how apt we are to this self-ignorance, how much we have to endanger us, how very plausible this self-deception is ? You see the reasons and the grounds why men shrink from this self-knowledge that is so essential to us ; therefore, is there no cause why each man should see to himself ? Let no man deceive himself ; let him examine and prove his own self ; let him not be afraid of knowing the truth. Truth is every man’s friend that is the friend of truth, and error is not the friend of any man. It may, and often does serve to delude, and delude to destroy. “ Faithful are the wounds of a friend ; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” Truth is that friend, and faithful are its wounds ; self-delusion is that enemy, and treacherous are its kisses. It embraces, in order that it may destroy. Judge your own selves. Do not let it keep you back from coming to the Lord’s table, or hinder you from confessing your sins at the foot of the cross. You must confess them sooner or later—at the bar of judgment, or at the foot of the cross. If you confess them there with humble, contrite, and believing

hearts, just as in that beautiful type of Jesus, the scape-goat, while the sins were confessed on the head of the goat, and the goat was slain and sacrificed because of the sins imputed to him, and another goat was let loose, and went into the wilderness, and was seen no more ; even so “ there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ ”—“ He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” He has taken away all our sins, and they shall be found no more, for He hath “ cast them into the depths of the sea.” Therefore, come in that spirit of deep humility, wishing to know yourselves, wishing for a knowledge of yourselves, so that you may have a knowledge of the Saviour ; sin the more bitter, and Christ the more sweet.

Then let us not forget that it is a blessed thing for a man to be brought to a calm acquaintance with himself, and to know that it is well with him. Surely that is the true warrant of peace, it is the true secret for a man to possess when he comes to sickness, it is the true pledge of a man when heart and flesh fail ; and then he shall not be found weeping, but he shall be full of joy in anticipation of a higher and better home.





XXIII.

SELF-IGNORANCE: ITS FOLLY, GUILT, AND PERIL.

“ Know ye not your own selves ? ”—2 COR. xiii., part of 5.

THERE are few things that we more resent, or are more impatient under, than to be imposed upon by others. We resent any attempt at imposition with a proper and righteous indignation ; but how strange it is that many, in the face of such resentment against imposition by others, should have no resentment against imposition by themselves upon themselves ; so far from it, that many court such imposition. The greatest impostor in the world is for the most part a man's own heart ; “ deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” It plays the fool with him, and he is such a fool that he does not suspect his folly. He oftentimes speaks of his own good heart, while his own life disproves it. It is very clear that men need of all things to be aroused to look well to themselves within their own inner life—to become acquainted with their own selves. For the most part, they are the most strangers to that mysterious inmate that is tabernacled in their own tent of clay ; and perhaps the thing men are most unacquainted with is their own moral state and condition, their own inner life.

It remains this morning, in winding up the subject and bringing it to a close, that I dwell upon the folly, the guilt,

and the peril, of such self-delusion. May God's Spirit shine into our hearts and minds, and give us to know ourselves, that we may know our Saviour, and our safety, for Christ's sake!

There are many men who pass to be wise, and who as far as worldly wisdom goes, *are* very wise, if this world were all; very prudent and very sagacious in the management of their terrestrial affairs; distinguished for their intellectual attainments; intelligent men; very familiar with science; very intimate with history, and who would be thought indeed very wise if this world's esteem were all; who are wise in their own esteem, and who would be ashamed and provoked, if charged with, or suspected of ignorance in matters of history, or science, or in matters of worldly business;—they would resent the charge, and would blush if the charge were brought home to them:—and yet these very men, with all their familiarity and acquaintance with these things, are altogether unacquainted with things internal—they have no knowledge of their own inner condition. It is true they may have studied metaphysics, they may understand the mere science of the mind, they may be acquainted with the intellectual faculties and their classification; but this is a totally different thing from knowing a man's moral being—from knowing what a man is in his relationship to God—from knowing what man is when viewed in the light of revelation—from knowing what man is in his relationship to immortality. Men know all about the things that perish, and yet have no conception at all—they have no right apprehension of their own moral state before God.

Now the *foolishness* of such ignorance is very apparent. If men were not so ignorant that they do not perceive it, the foolishness of such men must be apparent. At the outset, is there in science, or any study, a knowledge that so much concerns a man as a knowledge and study of himself? All these outward things will soon be done with, and will pass away,

but he himself remains ; he carries his deathless spirit within him, the centre and stay of his well-being or ill-being ; it must be with him, and he will never part from it, for it is himself ; the soul is the man, and man is the soul. Strip the soul of everything, and it is still there ; it is a conscious, living being ; it is a responsible, deathless being. Surely, then, it concerns a man most to know that which is himself ; surely it concerns a man to know that which can be, and will be, a little hell or a little heaven within him. As Milton makes the devil say :—

“ The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

After all, it is what a man feels, and enjoys, and suffers, and endures within himself, that constitutes real happiness or misery ; consequently there is nothing that concerns a man so much as to know himself, because himself is the great, wonderful, awful treasure intrusted to him by God, that he may be wretched for ever, or blessed for ever. Is it not a knowledge that we should study to know to the utmost, when we are at so much pains to know the mere casement of clay that enshrines us ? If a man suspects, for instance, such a disease as cancer ready to break out in agony and decay, or that his heart is out of order, that the vessels are enlarged, that its action is languid or weak ; or if a man suspects some latent disease within him that may admit of being cured, but that must be taken promptly, will he not give attention to it ? will he not take thought upon it ? will he not consult his physician ? will he not seek skilful advice ? will he wish to have the complaint hidden till it is too late to deal with it ? Will a man shrink from the trouble, and the pain, and the cost, and the labour, necessary to get rid of the disease of the body ? and shall a man be thus alive to the poor, pitiful, tenement of clay, that will soon be laid in the dust and become food for worms—shall he be so much alive to that

which can only cause pain, distress, disturbance through his body, and neglect altogether the maladies, the wants, the diseases, the distempers, the pains, that vex the deathless soul within him? If a man is wishful to know the wants of his body, he ought to be much more wishful to know his soul, its ailments and distempers, that they may be cured. How foolish it is for a man, then, to be ignorant of his inner state, when he may know it; and when he is not safe until he does know it, until he is set right as to the state of his soul! If a man were all beautiful and lovely, if he were living in order and submission to the will of God, in conformity to the image of Him who created him, in harmony with the spirit of heaven, "meet" for "the inheritance of the saints in light;" or if a man had not to die, all were well, and then a man might have some reason for neglect, though certainly he would not be indifferent to himself. When a man looks into that little world within him and gets but a glimpse, he startles and draws back; he shuns self-knowledge, because it is disturbing to him, because it distresses him; but if a man has suspicions, and feels that all is wrong, that it is not right within him—that his tempers, his desires, his motives, his appetites, his whole moral condition, his secret little kingdom that concerns him most deeply, is all in confusion and a state of anarchy; that there is no right government—if a man has his misgivings, and is conscious that such is his inward condition; surely it is the utmost fatuity for that man to turn away from it, from becoming acquainted with it aright. How can he have it rectified till he knows it? how can he have the disease eradicated till he probes it, and discovers its depth, and applies for medicine, and follows the prescription, as he must, if he avail himself of it? What a foolish thing it is when a man can have his heart set right, when he can only have it set right in this present short life of ours,—what a foolish thing for a man to recoil from a knowledge of his disease! If, indeed man could never be changed,

if man could never return to a better state, if he could never have the temple raised again from its ruins, or the broken harp strung again, that melody may dwell in its chords, then let us eat and drink, do good or bad, ill or well, for we shall soon die, and there will be an end of it. Ah! brethren, let no man deceive himself; "God is not mocked." It is not so with man; he *may* be restored, he *may* be healed, the broken harp *may* be strung again; for He who hath made us hath redeemed us, He who stamped us with His own image, has provided that His banished ones may be restored, that their worst distempers may be healed, that His dead ones may be awakened, and His outcast children brought back again. That is the spirit and the language of the gospel of Christ, and can any man hear it and not know it? Surely, then, it is the height of folly for a man when he has the means, when he has the remedy, to go on as if there were no means of life, in utter recklessness, and abandoning himself in hopeless despair; and still more, when a man recollects that it is here or nowhere, that it is now or never, that upon the breath of his nostril is suspended his everlasting condition, and that as he dies, so he will continue, unrighteous still or righteous still, unjust still or just still, unholy still or holy still, for ever and ever! Eternity will make no change in a man's nature, but he will go into the presence of God as he goes out of this poor world. Then, brethren, how much we might enlarge upon this point; the folly of man's refusing to know himself. It is no better—not a bit better—than poor children, when alarmed at night at some vain notion, plunging beneath the bed-clothes and thinking they are safe; or the ostrich, pressed in the chase, thrusting its head beneath its wings for safety; or the poor rabbit, hiding itself in its burrow while still exposed to the attacks of its pursuer. Better will be the precipice than the pitfall; better the agony of inflammation than the painlessness of mortification. Think of it. Is it not so?

And if the folly of self-ignorance is thus great, is the *guilt* less great? I grant that there is an ignorance that alleviates guilt, that "they that knew not their Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes;" and that the poor heathen, that never knew God's will to do it, may, comparatively speaking, have no sin. I have known foolish and ignorant persons who would shun to hear faithful preaching, and to have the word of God brought home to them, because their consciences told them of their guilt. What right has a man to do so? what excuse has he for shunning the truth? Is it manly? is it rational? is it right? Will it alleviate his guilt when his ignorance is wilful? If a man can help it, is it not then sin? is he not responsible for his ignorance of self, when he might have procured the knowledge? In matters of human justice, does the law do so? Suppose a man in his depravity wishes to bathe his hands in a brother's blood out of revenge, and suppose that the feeling of conscience that still makes a man a coward, makes him dread to do the deed he has determined to do, and suppose to get rid of that feeling, he drinks himself a madman, and nerves his hand to grasp the steel; can he plead, in arrest of judgment or in extenuation of his guilt, that he was drunk? Such a plea will not avail at the bar of justice? so far from it, he maddened himself, and is justly accounted to have aggravated his guilt by preparing himself, by becoming a brute. And if, brethren, at the bar of man such a plea will not avail, if it will not do for a man to say, "I knew not what I was doing, I was ignorant, I was unconscious, I was drunk at the time, will it avail at the bar of God if a man says, "I did not know it?" You might have known it. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." There is the history of self-cherished ignorance. Man is so utterly hardened

by sin, that if he have not grace he will not so much as think about it, he will not look it in the face ; and if the light that is in a man be darkness, and that darkness is cherished and studied, “ how great is that darkness ? ” Surely it is the first shadow of the darkness that shall never have an end. But the greatness of the guilt must surely present itself to every man’s mind. Why did God give us this wonderful power to know ourselves, the mysterious gift of self-consciousness, so that man can draw off his thoughts and attention from things external, and retire into the deep chambers of his heart, to the inward light that is revealed to the poor as well as to the rich, to the unlearned as well as to the learned, to the cottager and the peasant as well as to the philosopher and the classical scholar, that man may know himself, that he may study that which concerns him the most. This is open and revealed to every man, and he may have the knowledge by studying himself every day as he ought, and by watching what is going on within him, and keeping guard over his tempers and desires, and keeping his thoughts with all diligence.” Beautiful and blessed state. It may seem hard and difficult, but it is a glorious purpose when, by the grace of God, a man wishes to be a new man, to be restored to glory, and honour, and happiness, and heaven, and God ; surely that is worthy of the ambition of a deathless spirit ; and, therefore, what a sad guilt it is to throw all God’s gifts away, and to be taken up with the paltry pitiful vanities of this world, the lusts of the flesh, and the wretched habits which are, like the serpent, coiling around a man’s conscience and mind to destroy him, so that he goes “ as an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks ! ” What miserable slavery, what wretched delusion, to give up purity, liberty, life, the soul, and immortality for ! Therefore, you see plainly there is great guilt in a man not knowing himself.

And, surely—though we may but briefly dwell upon it—the *peril* is not less than the folly and the guilt. It often starts upon a man quite unsuspected, and like the disease most quiet, most latent, it is not suspected until it breaks out ; and so it is, that which, through mercy, is given as a Christian's opportunity has oftentimes proved so. Does not a man oftentimes find self-deception has been stealing upon him when he did not suspect it ? I have often thought it a pity men's souls are invisible, impalpable ; I have often thought, if we could but make them open as the body, where we can watch the changes that take place, the hectic colour on the cheek, the scale on the eye, and the other evidences of approaching mortality ; if our souls could assume a visible form, a tangible shape, so that we could see them as they are, we should be alive to them, and attend to them. But it is not so. Still a man can, and surely ought, to know the state of his own soul, and to think of his real danger. If a man is ready, all is right ; and then it is a comfort to him to look at himself, and thank God for what He has wrought for him. He knows that if there is much that there ought not to be, he is making some progress ; old things are passing away, all things are becoming new—that is, if grace has entered the heart. Instead of a man being afraid of examining himself, it is then a source of joy and thankfulness ; for though he is not what he ought to be, he is not what he was—in some sort there is a change in him. And if, on the other hand, a man is not right with God, but is altogether at enmity with Him, surely a man should know that, and know it as soon as he can. Should not we wish to know somewhat as He knows ? And let us not forget that a man is in some danger if he neglects to look into himself. He is not certain he will have life long left to look beyond and above, and to set his house in order ; and when he seeks to get oil, he may find that his

lamp has gone out—that the door is shut. A man has no right to presume and say, “I shall have time enough.” Nay! who told you that? Can you lengthen out the glass of time, or multiply the sands that drop from the glass? You cannot. Then, what right have you to tempt God, by putting off the work for which He has given you time and opportunity? Never let it be forgotten, that for man to come to a right knowledge of himself is at once his supreme peace and duty; and if he neglects it, he surely puts himself in some peril. There is at times some awakening to danger, in this world even, and very sad and fearful it is. I can conceive a man brought up with tenderness under a mother’s care; I can conceive him step by step rushing on in crime, until at last his hands are bathed in another’s blood; I can conceive him summoned, arrested, tried, and condemned; I can conceive him in his dungeon cell, with heavy chains upon him; I can conceive him the night before his execution falling into a deep sleep, and dreaming of early days—of a mother’s love, of his pleasant cottage, of his quiet home, of dear faces, and friends who loved him, and are now no more; I can conceive him dreaming thus, till he feels full of joy and peace; but no, there is a sound of the lock turning, and of chains clanking, and the gaoler enters his cell. What an awful awakening! The man awakes to the dread reality, and it is not what he dreamed, it is not what his fancy pictured to him, and he dies the death of pain, and anguish, and disgrace! Let us take heed lest we deceive ourselves, and so stand before an omniscient God, to whom “all things are naked and opened,” and “with whom we have to do.”

Then, beloved, “know ye not your own selves?” Study to do so. I have striven to show you how apt we are to go on in this self-ignorance, and how inexcusable it is; I have striven to open up to you some of the secret causes why men do so much

forget themselves ; and I now show you the folly, and the guilt and the peril, of so deceiving yourselves. And now, dear brethren, let me entreat you to be willing to know yourselves. Surely we should be willing. You may say, "I cannot, I am so perplexed, I am so estranged ; there is such a mixture of motive and passion, of hope and fear, of desire and conviction, I cannot." Ah, are you trying in good earnest? Many say they cannot get time to do it. Get time ! Why was time given ? What is of such importance as a knowledge of yourself and your Saviour ? We cannot know our Saviour until we know ourselves ; we cannot know our need of a Saviour, as a physician for our inward maladies, until we know our inward condition. Then, brethren, if you would know yourselves, you must deal honestly with yourselves. You will find, as soon as you begin to examine yourselves, that Satan is besetting you, that he will magnify your virtues, and extenuate your vices. This will not do. If a man has a desire to cheat his master, and he knows that his accounts must come before the eye of his master, he is very careful how he introduces any errors, from fear that they shall be found out. Will not God find you out ? Therefore, deal honestly with yourselves, desire to be honest with yourselves—know the truth. And if you would do this, remember you must judge yourselves by the right standard. It will not do for a man to measure himself with himself, or to compare himself by himself ; it will not do for a man to test himself with the world's standard of virtue, and to think "I am no worse than others ; and, indeed, better than most men." Will it do for a man to take this standard of his own heart, which is the most liable to deceive him ? He will take a false standard, if he takes the standard of fallen human nature. The only certain standard which will be brought out in the face of the universe, and by which we shall be tried and decided, will be the Word of God. "Thy word is very pure ; therefore thy servant

loveth it." That Word is the standard ; search yourselves by it ; examine yourselves, prove your own selves. To prove a thing, is to test it by a standard ; and the standard placed before us is the word of God. You may anticipate the judgment, by appealing yourselves to the judgment book.

And, brethren, there are two points more of equal importance. If you would judge yourselves aright, and by the right standard, judge yourselves in the right light. Nature's dark taper cannot give you any distinct knowledge of yourselves ; look up, then, to God to give you the help of the Holy Spirit to reveal yourselves to yourselves, to shine into your hearts, and to give you inward discernment and perception of yourselves ; pray to the Spirit of Christ, to take of the things of Christ and show them unto you. Listen to what He says :— " God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That all with unveiled faces—the cloud of self-delusion and ignorance drawn aside through the Spirit of God—" we all, with open face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

And then, brethren, whatever you find in yourselves to be wanting, however manifold the guilt, however numerous the imperfections and errors of thought and word and deed you discover, oh do not cloak them over, do not turn your back upon them, as though they were done with, but rather say—as God has promised He will do—" Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me." " Who can tell how oft he offendeth ? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults." Go to " the blood of sprinkling," go to the great Physician ;

never rest until you find the precious cure going on in your life and soul, until you find you are returning to health and happiness ; and then still deal faithfully and truly with yourselves ; go on still as you get better, as you hope to be better still, and yet say, with the Psalmist, " Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts : And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."





XXIV.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

“ And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.”—
1 JOHN iv., part of 16.

NOTHING can be more certain, even as Scripture is certain, than the fundamental fact which we this day* solemnly avouch. It underlies and permeates the entire structure of the kingdom of grace. It is the triplex pillar that sustains the temple of God's grace, and the entire word of reconciliation ; but if it ever should be comprehended, it will never be in this world, it will not be until the world of light and glory that has yet to come ; indeed, it admits of much question whether ever it can be comprehended, for the co-existence of the Trinity in Unity seems to involve infinitude, and how can the finite comprehend or measure the Infinite ? It is doubtful whether the loftiest creatures in the kingdom of heaven at all comprehend the great mystery, though they rejoice in its blessings. So far from its being our duty to explain the inexplicable, or to solve the fathomless, or to brood over the bounds around which the great God has enthroned the thick cloud of His own reserve, we are to stop where He stops as well as go as far as He leads us, and we are to reverence the silence of God as much as the voice of “ the lively oracles,” instead of attempting in any way to lower or bring down to our capacities the great mystery. Those who would upbraid it against the Catholic faith that it is a great mystery, do but bring to bear an argu-

* Trinity Sunday Morning, 1863.

ment most powerful to satisfy us, that we therefore should submit ourselves entirely to the declarations of God, for “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.” Then, this being seen as a mystery, and objected to as a mystery, is an argument in its proof, and not in disproof; for if it were no mystery, it were not the truth of God touching his own divine nature. Its being a mystery, therefore, so far from stumbling or staggering us, challenges our profoundest reverence and simplest submission. We rather, brethren, desire to fix your hearts and minds on the practical appreciation, and the personal apprehension, of the great truth. We have, therefore, made choice of the words of the disciple whom Jesus loved. When speaking of himself to his fellow disciples, he says with full confidence and assurance, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” It is not a matter of mere hearsay, or of speculation, or of creed, or of theory; it is a matter of confidence, of calm and full experimental assurance. “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.”

The love of the Father :—the love of the Son :—the love of the Holy Ghost—as known and as believed by the people of God; this is our subject. We cannot have one more encouraging, more comforting, and more worthy of all acceptation. May the Spirit, whose office it is to make known and convince, and bring to acceptance and belief of the truth, the people of God, vouchsafe His presence and His power.

We have known and believed *the love that the Father hath to us*. No man can read his Bible aright, and doubt that love. No man can help knowing it; for He first loved us, and it cannot be otherwise. We are the transgressors; He was transgressed against. We are rebels; He is the ruler against whom we have rebelled. Our natural mind is “at enmity” with His mind—it is not submissive to His will, nor able to be, from its intense repugnance to the requirements of God; then, how could it be that love would ever first come from us? We

might as well expect sweetness from bitterness, limpid sweet water from a bitter stream, light from darkness, as love from guilty mankind towards our Creator, our Preserver, and our Judge. "Herein is love, not that we loved God" the Father, "but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"—"God commendeth His love towards us," He extols it, He magnifies it, He displays it in the presence of the whole universe, "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." While we were enemies we were reconciled to God; therefore, before ever there was aught of friendship or of filial feeling, before there was aught of relenting, aught of a desire or disposition to return towards God,—“while we were enemies, Christ died for us.” It is of vast importance that we should have no mistake here. As I lately heard in London a man, who ought to have known better, say, “You represent the good God as if He were the enemy of His creatures, as though He required nothing less than the blood of His own Son to slack His wrath and reconcile Him towards man.” My reply was, “Every one who studies his Bible knows it experimentally, and is able to reply, that so far from its being because God was bent upon being reconciled, it was because He was so moved by compassion and boundless love, that He would open up a channel through which grace might flow, and because He would maintain His moral government, and would have harmony, because He would bring back a glorious company of His estranged and fallen offspring into pardon, peace, and glory, *therefore*, ‘God so loved the world’—not hated it—‘that He gave His only-begotten Son’ to die for us, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’” As we have it in the gospel of the morning, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Did God, then, wish that we should perish? Did He not give everlast-

ing life? Could He give greater evidence or demonstration of His good will towards us, of His desire that we might not perish, than He did in not sparing His own Son," but delivering Him up? If, then, God "spared not His own Son," but yielded Him up to be the atonement for the guilt of mankind, who can comprehend the height, or the depth, or the length, or the breadth of the love of God? Here is a theme that may be searched into, but can never be gauged. Did not God put the bitter cup into the hands of His dear Son? did He not decline to let that bitter cup pass, because if it passed from the Son it must have passed back to the sinner? did not God lay on Him "the iniquity of us all?" Thus was justice satisfied, while mercy triumphed; thus was man reconciled, while God was glorified; thus was the law fully met in all its demands, and yet its curse removed from the guilty head, and righteousness fulfilled in the person of every one that accepts it and is accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jehovah our Righteousness, who is our peace. And this is "the word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all.)" Now, brethren, this love of the Father is known and believed by every man who is saved. He does not come to God as one who hates him, but as one who pities and compassions him. He does not come to God with terror and dread, but with hope and trust. He is the magnet that draws back man's estranged affections to the Creator; He is the magnet, like the sceptre which Ahasuerus held forth to Esther, and it encourages the trembling penitent to cast himself at the footstool of God, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "God is love;" therefore, I cannot and do not shrink back; He loved me before I loved Him, He sought me before I sought him, He looked for me when I was a prodigal and afar off, He waited for me returning, and when I returned, He fell on my neck and kissed me: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." We have known this. It is dis-

covered and revealed in the gospel. The love of God towards a lost world is the essence of revelation, and we "have known and believed" it. No man can be saved until he believes and lays hold on it. If we grasp it, we are rescued; but if we slight it, we perish. There is no alternative. "We have known and believed the love of God" the Father.

Can any man believe and know the love of the Father, and not know and believe *the love of God the Son* towards us? If God delivered up His Son for us all, was it against the Son's will? Was there, if we might venture so to speak, a schism in the Deity? God forbid. No more willing was the Father to reconcile us to Him than was the Son to undertake our reconciliation; and He himself says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." When He came into the world commissioned by the Father to accomplish the wondrous enterprise of reconciliation, He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will;" and though it is true His humanity trembled, as if to show its truth,—for humanly He could scarcely but hesitate and tremble at the approach of the hour of darkness, and the bitter cup,—yet, what did He say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt"—"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Was not this unspeakable love—love that passeth knowledge? And then, brethren, look at the love of the blessed Son in "His agony and bloody sweat," in "His cross and passion," in "His precious death and burial," and in "His glorious resurrection and ascension." Look at His love in all His tenderness to poor sinners, in all His yearning compassion, even over His foes that imbrued their hands in His blood: "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" And look, brethren, at His love throughout all His dealings with the

sinful sons of men. Was there ever love like unto His love? Oh, let a man study the history of Jesus, and then say, is there not in the love of the Son something most touching? It is in Christ crucified the love of the Father is displayed, and in Christ crucified we see the love of the Son. "He that hath seen me hath seen my Father." And if we see love of the Father in the face of the Son, must we not see love of the Son in His own blessed face? Who can dwell as he ought on Christ's passion, and on the last scenes of His sojourn on earth without feeling that His love is overwhelming, and that eternity is too short to state it? "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood," "and hath made our robes white in the blood of the Lamb," "to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Now, brethren, every child of God knows and believes that love of Jesus. He cannot help knowing it if he studies his Bible—if he believes his Bible. What is the revelation of God, but the revelation of Jesus Christ? "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The Old Testament saints "saw His day, and rejoiced;" and how much more should we, who have the full light of the day of grace, believe the love of Jesus? "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." Then, brethren, they must know Him if it is constraining them. And they must not simply know but believe. It is not what a man knows in theory, but believes in fact, and apprehends; what a man appropriates, what a man finds to be the salvation of the whole soul, his joy, his hope, his all. It is that that will tell upon a man. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself"—"We have known and believed the love that God" the Son "hath to us." We have tasted that He is gracious—we

have tasted the cup of salvation ; “we love Him, because He first loved us.” Oh, how great that love ! so great, that He tells us He loves us with “everlasting love,” and that “the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee ;” so great, that He says, a mother may forget her sucking child ; yet will He not forget us.

Then, brethren, we have known and believed also *the love of the Holy Ghost*. It is absolutely necessary that a man should have the Spirit, or he will never know the love of the Father effectually and experimentally, nor the love of the Son in its power and preciousness. Men may hear of the love of God, but what does it signify to them? Men may hear how Jesus loved us, and died for us, but it is to them as an idle tale, and has no charm or interest for them. The coldness and indifference of many of those who pronounce a creed, and have been baptized into the name of Jesus—their coldness and indifference to Christ, to God the Father, and to the Holy Spirit—is something perfectly astounding and marvellous ! If men’s hearts were not altogether dead and hardened, it would not be so. Be assured of it, the love of the Spirit is just as mighty in its display, and just as essential as the love of the Father and the love of the Son ; for, in the economy of redemption, each Person has His own peculiar office,—though in some sort and sense what one does all do, and therefore all are spoken of frequently as doing the work of one, yet each accomplishes special functions for man’s deliverance,—and the function of the blessed Spirit is as distinctly stated as the function of the Father and the function of the Son ; for if the Father planned our redemption, and gave his Son that we might be redeemed, and if the Son followed out the redemption planned by the Father, and gave Himself for us, the Spirit of God, sent from the Father by the Son, carries into effect the glorious redemption that has been accomplished,

making it effectual to man's salvation. It is not enough that man is redeemed and saved through, and by, and in consequence of receiving the redemption; but man must have the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost, as you have it in the Catechism, in that beautiful summary of the Apostles' Creed, where you see distinctly the threefold function: "First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me, and all the world. Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me, and all mankind. Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God." If a man, therefore, be not sanctified, if he be not separated from the sinful stock and grafted into Christ, the new stem, he is not a partaker of His salvation, and does not live in Him through whom redemption has been for him—he has not laid hold of it, and apprehended it. Therefore the work of the Spirit and the love of the Spirit is to be received with all humility, with all fulness of conviction—as we had it, indeed, in the gospel of the morning, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." It is the means of gospel salvation, and a man cannot see it until it is given to him to see it by the light of the Spirit; a man cannot enter it unless he is "born of water and of the Spirit;" therefore you see the love of the Spirit is just as essential as the love of the Father, and the love of the Son—"the whole three are co-essential together, and co-equal." Oh, the love of the Spirit! that He should condescend to come and dwell with us, and strive with us, and teach us, rebellious creatures as we are. Let us beware, then, lest we grieve the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit thus still works mightily and effectually in the minds of men and upon our blind understandings. If He moved upon chaos, ere creation emerged out of darkness, He moves in the dark soul within, and causes men to be born again. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is

Spirit"—or, as the Greek is, "is born from above." The birth beneath may do for this world, but the birth from above is essential for the love of God; for no man can live a spiritual life if he has not a spiritual birth. Therefore, not less essential is the work of the Spirit than the work of the Father and of the Son; and the man who has that blessed work accomplished in him, and has it in progress within him, how can he but love that Spirit that first loved him, and brought him to a knowledge of the true God, whom to know is "life eternal," who has dislodged and displaced the enmity of the carnal mind, and substituted for it the faith and love of God in Christ, and is carrying on in him that blessed work of grace which shall at last be crowned and consolidated in glory? That blessed Spirit is revealed by His own light in His own Word; not by voice or vision, but by the simple record made clear. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"—"No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost"—"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his"—"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Thus, therefore, brethren, a man must surely know and believe that blessed and heavenly Teacher, and divine Comforter, and almighty Sanctifier. Does not a man know his father that begat him, and his mother that nourishes him? then, especially, should not the believer acknowledge the Father that begat him anew, the Spirit by which he was begotten, and the blessed Son by whom he has found reconciliation, in whom he is a new creature, old things are passed away? Can a man be brought to Christ, and not know it? Can a man love God for a Father, and not know it? Can a man have the Spirit for a teacher and guide, and comforter, and not know it?

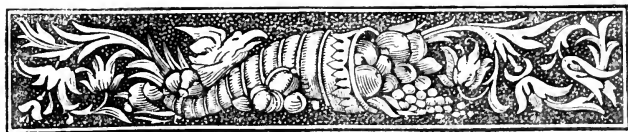
"We have known and believed the love that God hath

towards us." Blessed truth this! It is, indeed, the very essence and end of the great doctrine of Three in One. If you mean to discuss about it, or attempt to explain it ever so philosophically, it is just "vanity of vanities." We must receive it humbly and simply. If a man is brought to this, he can say, in some measure at least, I know and have believed the love that God hath to me, the love of the Father that has redeemed me, the love of the Son by whom I have been redeemed, and the love of the Spirit by whom I am made meet to be a partaker of that redemption. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," to each as three in one, for I know each person by myself to be indeed a God of love. Now, brethren, we need this. The natural mind of man looks at God with dismay and dislike, and fear and horror. It is natural that it should be so; for we are sinful, and He is holy; we are unjust, and God is just; we are guilty, and God will judge us: therefore it is natural. We never can return to God through dread or fear. It may lead us to wish to escape, but it never will draw us to God. If we are to be drawn to God, it will be by the feeling that He loved us before we loved Him, that it was all from His movement and not from our own, that it was from Him coming to us; we did not move towards Him, but He towards us; and He "remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth for ever." If you desire to escape His wrath, oh pray that you may see His love—love that will give you reconciliation and peace in Christ.

And, brethren, I again say, let no man stumble and stagger at the mystery. I have known some stagger at the Athanasian Creed we have used this morning. I have no sympathy with them. Inasmuch as the love of the Father must be known and believed, so must the love of the Son be known and believed, and so must the love of the Spirit be known and believed, if any man is saved. Surely *that* is no incompre-

hensible mystery, but it is made clear and brought home to us in a most beautiful and comprehensive way. Instead of stumbling and disturbing our minds by listening to philosophical doubts and vain explanations, we should become as little children. Seek to know the love of the Father, and the love of the Son, and the love of the Spirit, and then shall you rest in peace. Your souls will be sustained the more you seek to love Him ; and the more you do so, the more will you apprehend the love of God ; for “ he that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is love ;” and “ he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”





XXV.

THE LIBERTY OF THE SPIRIT.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

—2 Cor. iii. part of 17.

How much is made of earthly liberty, and yet it is but a shadow of true freedom. How true it is, as the apostle says, that whilst many men profess to give liberty to others, they themselves are the slaves of corruption; and that man is the greatest slave who is a slave within; for they who lock up a man from mere temporal freedom cannot put chains upon the soul—they cannot restrain the intercourse of the spirit with “the Father of Spirits.” That intercourse may be enjoyed not less in the dungeon than in the temple; it may be enjoyed by a man when he is loaded with chains, as well as when he walks abroad in the fullest emancipation. Men are content to be slaves within, who would be very indignant at any attempt to make them slaves without. They would “fight,” as they say, “to the death,” for what they call liberty, and what is precious in its place, and of its kind; and yet how readily they will yield up that freedom, without which man must be a slave, however much he may boast, and with which he has indeed “perfect freedom,” however he may be tried, or bound, or persecuted, or imprisoned. That is true liberty that will lead a man to set at nought the dungeon and its chains, a liberty that will allow men to mount up as in a chariot of fire towards God, whilst their bodies are consumed to ashes, a liberty which as on this

day* God bestowed on His faithful people in a large measure—it is that which alone deserves the high and holy name of liberty. The apostle, speaking of the bondage of the law, and of how the Jewish people still had their chains, said, that when the heart of the Jew shall turn to the Lord, then, and not till then, shall they indeed come to the true freedom; for “the Lord is that Spirit;” He is the Divine Spirit, who is “Lord of lords,” and King of kings,” in union with the Father and the Son; and then he goes on to say, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

How appropriate, then, is the passage to the purpose and the day! How beautiful the season and the service of the day; all nature rejoicing, the earth bringing forth of its fulness, unfolding the beautiful landscape, breathing freshness and sweetness around—every tree breaking forth into buds, and leaves, and flowers—a gracious rain having descended in fruitfulness upon the land, and all around telling us of life and liberty, and love to a fallen world! How, then, ought our hearts at such a season to be lifted up higher to the great reality; and how ought we to look for that heavenly Spirit to be poured out, without which there is no true life, no abiding beauty, no continuing peace, and no heavenly liberty?

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” We shall seek to describe to you *the liberty that crowns the habitation of the Spirit in the soul of the child of God.* May that Spirit, touching whom we are to treat, vouchsafe His own light and divine power, that we may have in our hearts that liberty wherewith He makes His people free.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty from condemnation.*—If a man is under sentence of death, he cannot find liberty in prison, or even if respited for a time and allowed to go abroad, for still he is under sentence of execution; he is still a prisoner at large, and the sentence awaits him. He may

* Whitsunday Morning, 1864.

forget it in mirth and in feasting, but the day will inevitably come. And it is not the less real because he forgets it—it is not the less certain, because he turns away from it. The morning will come when the prison doors will creak on their hinges, and the executioner of justice will be in his cell, and he will be dragged off to his fearful doom. Is not this a picture of every one of us? We are under the sentence of God's broken law; and, assuredly, they that are under the law, are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." And if this is God's own sentence, is He "a man that He should lie; or the son of man that He should repent?" Men may deny Him, but He cannot deny Himself; He cannot forfeit His own truth, or alter His own immutable laws: "As I live, saith the Lord God," "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Infallible sentence! The sentence passed on every man is a sentence of inevitable condemnation. How beautiful, then, is the language of the apostle. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." What, then, is the evidence that we walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit? If the Spirit of Christ dwells in a man, it is evidence that a man dwells in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation"—"being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" therefore, how glorious the liberty sealed to him who believeth in Christ. The law cannot sentence him, death cannot claim him for his own, Satan cannot lord it over him, and no power in earth or hell can rob him of the liberty which is in Christ Jesus. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," free with the liberty which lasts for ever.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty from law*.—For man, under the law, cannot but be under sentence, because the law knows nothing of mercy and forgiveness.

Its command is, "Do this, and live; break this in the least, and die." There is no alternative. Mutability is imperfection and weakness; and in proportion as the law is unchangeable and irrevocable, it is worthy of God; therefore, "by the deeds of the law" shall no man have peace with God. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." There is the proof; there is the evidence. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" but if a man have the Spirit of Christ, then he is Christ's, and that proves as much that he is in Christ as the branch proves that it is of, and connected with the vine, when it produces leaves, and buds, and blossoms, and flowers, and at last brings forth fruit to perfection. Who, *then*, can doubt that the branch is in union with the stem from which it derives all its fertility and beauty? So, in like manner, if any man be in the Spirit of Christ, he is a new man: "Old things are passed away, all things are become new." Make the tree good, and the fruit is good. If a man is brought into holiness, he is no more under the law. The law would never, never of itself, have helped him to become holy. The law cannot give him peace; but, so far from it, we are told expressly, "Sin shall not have the dominion over you;" and why? "Ye are not under the law." You never can make peace with God under the law; but ye are no longer under the covenant of works, but under the covenant of grace, embracing the law, put into the heart, and written upon the inward parts.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty to obey*.— Many think they are free, and that they will do as they like; but they do not like to do what they ought to like, and therefore they are slaves after all. No man is so lost to conscience

and a sense of the great God, that he can altogether approve what he follows, in following the world. He has checks, he has disquietings, he has convincings that he is wrong at times, and he makes abortive efforts to alter his course. Like the poor drunkard trying to abstain from the damning bowl, the impure and brutal from his lust, the proud man from his temper, the covetous and selfish man to break loose from his bondage and his debased passions, the more he makes the attempt, the more abortive it is, if it is made in his own strength and power. He is "after the flesh, and minds the things of the flesh." The tree must be made good before the fruit will be good; the fountain must be purified before the stream will become limpid and pure. The way in which a man may convince himself of his emptiness, when he is at enmity with God, is to try to be what he ought to be. He can do nothing of himself, and he must be brought to the blessed conviction that he can do no good thing without God: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Then when a man is led by God, he can indeed walk in the ways of God; and though the flesh in him—the old nature—will still "lust against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other," and "ye cannot do the things that ye would," yet "sin shall not have the dominion over him," but what the flesh cannot do, the Spirit will enable him to do. "It is God which worketh in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure;" therefore "we should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." "They that are after the Spirit, do mind the things of the Spirit."

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty to fight the good fight of faith*.—A man can do battle with his corrupt nature, he can win the victory over the principalities and powers of darkness, and his sword is a sword of liberty. He need no longer be dragged in captive chains by the powers of

darkness, but he is enabled to overcome his vile passions; the drunkard becomes a sober man, the impure man becomes a chaste man, the churl becomes softened and subdued, the vindictive man becomes forgiving, the hard-hearted man becomes merciful, and the unforgiving man becomes charitable, by the power of the Spirit of God. "Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off;" showing that when "the Spirit is poured upon us from on high," then shall "the wilderness be a fruitful field;" then will He "plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; He will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together." It is this, brethren, that is liberty.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty of access to God*, the one true and living way that is open, by drawing near to the blessed Redeemer, who hath "entered within the veil," who hath "ascended up on high," that we might have a way of access to God, and that God might be just in receiving us. This way cannot be discerned; it cannot be discovered; it cannot be trodden, except a man has it revealed to him by the Spirit of God. If a man comes to God in a right spirit, he is constrained to say, "Oh wretched man that I am;" and to cry with Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." And there went a live coal from the fire on the altar and touched his lips, and his iniquity was taken away, and his sin was purged, and he looked the great and awful God in the face, and in humble, filial confidence, said, "Here am I: send me." Through Christ we have access of obedience and liberty, by one Spirit, through the Father, by the Son. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us." No man can pray in the law of

love and liberty, no man can pray in the law of communion and fellowship, that does not pray in the Spirit. How vain the altar, and the sacrifice, and the wood, without the fire; but when the fire came, the sacrifice was consumed, and kindled a sweet-smelling savour that went up to God. How often many of us say prayers, and "our very prayers need repenting of!" how many prayers are uttered with the mouth, while the heart is far from God! Will God honour and consider such prayers? Dear brethren, we must come in the spirit of prayer; and in the house of God, and in our closets, we must look to the Spirit of God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Out of a man's heart, whether in the fulness of thankfulness, or in the depth of humiliation, must prayer proceed; and then, when we pray in the Spirit, the Spirit opens the door.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty of holy boldness and fortitude in the service of God*.—How coldly are many men serving as soldiers of Christ! They are afraid and ashamed to speak to fallen worms of the great and holy God; they close their lips when Christ and His Word are dishonoured. If their own son, or the wife of their bosom were dishonoured, how quick they would be to resent the injury; but they will not acknowledge Christ and his Word, and they think it their glory not to confess Him, when the glory is that He is not ashamed of us. When the Spirit of God helps a man's infirmities, and enables him by His strength to withstand the fear of man, he is then bold, and he is ready to say, with the holy men in the face of the burning fiery furnace, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." It was in the power of that Spirit that the martyrs stood before the tribunals of wicked men, unabashed and undismayed; and though they were bound in dungeons, though they suffered in the rack, though they were tormented in the stocks, they

triumphed as they died. Oh, the power of the Holy Spirit to give joy, and peace, and liberty, in the midst of bondage and tribulation !

Then, the crown of all, there is *liberty from the fear of death*.—There are men who are “all their lifetime subject to bondage” “through fear of death.” The thought of death continually oppresses them ; ay, even some of God’s servants shrink back from that dread spectre, the king of terrors—from the dissolution of the mysterious tie that binds the material to the immaterial, that binds the soul and the body together. Many who will not confess it, are oftentimes in sore dread of the approach of the king of terrors. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the soul is delivered from the bondage through the fear of death ; we see death swallowed up in victory, the king of terrors is stripped of his power, and the grave is to us the garden of immortality. It is beautiful to see this, and yet how sometimes God’s people have much to fear, though they find peace at the last. As a beloved friend in his eighty-fifth year—than whom none had preached Christ more faithfully and more consistently, even he in the depths of his own unworthiness—said, “Pray for me, pray for me ; I see nothing I have done but what is wrong and imperfect.” I told him the Spirit of the Lord would take away the apprehension of death, and so it was. On the morning of his death, when weary and faint, his beloved child whispered to him, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” He just breathed softly forth, “Cleanseth! cleanseth! then all is peace and joy ;” and with that upon his lips, and with a feeble sigh, he fell asleep in Christ. How the Spirit of God can drive away doubt and sorrow, and enable the dying saint to say, “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Dear brethren, I beseech you, then, to ask more earnestly and more constantly, and more fervently, for that blessed

Spirit. There is much indifference and coldness creeping over the Church. There is much of false doctrine abroad ; I have heard of it in London, and in high places. What we need more and more, is the light within, the light from above. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." We are taught of God that He will be "enquired of." If we seek more largely, if we believe more largely, we shall see "greater things" than we have seen. We are not restricted in God's promises, but we are "straightened in our own bowels." Ask, then, that the Spirit may be with you when you receive the tokens of His love. I trust there were many at the early communion who felt the power of that Spirit, and that it will be so with you who are here now. Whatever we do, we must do in the help of the Spirit. Ask the Spirit to reveal Christ in you, so that you may not only receive the outward memorials of his dying love, but that you may feel inward sustenance, and peace, and joy, and hope, and strength, and love, and an increasing desire to serve Him more and more.

Above all, "if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit," for God's glory, and our joy, for Christ's sake. Amen.





XXVI.

FERVENT LOVE OF THE BRETHREN.

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”—1 PETER i. 22.

SELFISHNESS, or the exaggerated love of self, was the source and seal of the fall of man. Instead of being obedient to God, he made himself his own God; he obeyed himself, and rebelled against his Creator. As selfishness is essentially the root of man's apostacy, so the restoration to love is essentially the spring of man's restoration to God. The Divine image was effaced by man becoming selfish, and that Divine image is restored by man becoming benevolent. Love of God in Christ, through the power of the Spirit; and love of mankind, but most of all, love of those with whom God's children shall dwell through all eternity—this is peculiarly and pre-eminently the work of that blessed Spirit, that, as on this day,* was sent down in large abundance on the Church. He who has not the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, transforming itself into love towards the brethren, lacks the discriminating sign of being born from above. St. Peter is admonishing the brethren to abide in Christian kindness and affection; and he bids them, therefore, to consider the very purpose that God had wrought, and he says, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the

* Whitsunday Evening, 1864.

truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

God grant that the Spirit, of whose work we are specially to discourse, may vouchsafe to purify, and enlighten, and quicken us, for Christ's name sake.

The work accomplished: "Seeing ye have purified your souls."—There is the beginning of all. Many men are disposed to work from without, and not from within; but the Spirit works from within, and not from without. Men think that, if they whitewash the sepulchre, it is enough. No, it must be cleansed. Men naturally pay some attention to the outward conduct; but as the soul is, such is the man. If the soul be without the work of the Spirit in it, of what avail the semblance? It is a pretence, a mockery, and hypocrisy. See to it then, and "keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" and death. "They that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit"—"To be spiritually-minded is life and peace." Therefore, the grand point is having the heart good. It is an easy thing to a certain extent to be decent in our outward conduct and conversation; but, oh! to have the springs of action, and the secret workings of the soul in harmony; this is the difficult task. "Ye have purified your souls." How beautiful the expression—"purified!" The heart is impure—what vain thoughts, what evil inclinations, what sinful desires, what presumptuous actions, what corrupt designs, what selfish passions, what evil appetites, what vain fancies, are continually gushing forth as from a deep stream! Men talk of their good minds and good hearts:—what a self-deception, what a lie! for if the heart were good, would not the life be good? From within, and out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man, and come out of him. If a man is sober in his heart, will he be a drunkard in his body? if he is

chaste in his heart, will he be impure in his body? if he is meek and lowly in his heart, will he be passionate, and angry, and proud in his body? If he is pure in heart, the outward purity will follow. Make clean the inside "of the cup and platter;" it is not enough to polish the outside of the platter, if the inward part is full of loathing and of all uncleanness.

"Ye have purified." Man is not a passive subject, but he is an active agent. God works in him, and enables him "to will and to do of his good pleasure," as we pray in our beautiful collect for Easter Sunday, "as by Thy special grace preventing us, Thou dost put into our minds good desires; so, by Thy continual help, we may bring the same to good effect." It is first the Spirit of God that puts the desire, that puts the design and aim into the heart; and then, by His constant help, He enables us to "bring the same to good effect." It is not made of good effect without any effort of our own; and if we are languid and not in earnest, it never will be accomplished. It will never, never be accomplished, if we do not co-operate heartily and earnestly. There must be co-operation on our part, with the influence of the mighty Spirit of God. He puts the machinery in motion, and keeps it in motion. It is still of Him, and without the motive-power the machine would stand still, but with the power it must act. This is, I conceive, a point of great moment; for there is in the present day a presumption, a latitudinarian and an Antinomian feeling, on this subject of grace in the heart of man. Be diligent, then, and show that you have the power of the Spirit in your heart. Be in earnest, and then shall you seek, and be able to find, if you "search for Him with all your heart." It is a mighty task, it is a wondrous work to accomplish, and time is short, and eternity knows no end. Your damnation, or your salvation, are trembling in the balance; be up then, and doing! "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Awake, and call upon thy God." "Awake, thou that

sleepest; arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life." The work accomplished then, is purifying the soul.

The instrument of its accomplishment: "Ye obey the truth."—God works by instruments in the order of His providential creation and government; for it is a law of almost universal obtaining that, as we can do nothing without Him, so generally He will do nothing without us. He acts on the heart, in order to achieve what He would have done; and so in all the business of life, in all our daily pursuits and occupations, we have certain means to employ; and if we neglect them, or try to substitute others than those God has appointed, we have our toil in vain. If a man falls in with the providences, and depends on the grace of God, then, indeed, his work shall not be "in vain in the Lord." God has appointed, in order to the purifying of men's souls, a divinely-constituted means. It is obtained here; we need not "ascend into heaven" to bring it down, or to "dive into the deep" to bring it up. No, here in our hearts and minds we have the word of truth, the incorruptible seed of which His people are born again—that purifying fire by which the tin and the dross are purged away, and by which the holy metal is made meet for the image and superscription of the King of kings. As I saw a dear child of God in anguish and suffering, only on Saturday last, she had her Bible open before her, and she said with a deep smile upon her face, and with the intensest interest, "O how I love my Bible! all other books are useless, compared with that. I want none besides; O how I love it!" "Thy law," cried the Psalmist, "is hid in my heart." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The metal of man's fallen nature is cast in the mould of disobedience and falsehood by Satan, and such is the image and superscription, that it wants not simply repairing, but casting again. As good Bishop Beveridge says, "If the bell be splintered, or if it be merely jarred, you cannot repair it; it must be cast

again." And so it is with the heart of man; it will not do to temporize and try to mend it; we must pray that it may be cast anew. "A new heart," says God, "I will give you, and a right spirit." "I will put my spirit into your heart." And therefore, brethren, we must purify our hearts, or rather, we must seek to be enabled by the Spirit of God to purify them in this wise, that the metal having been smelted by the fire of the Spirit of truth, it may be cast into the beautiful mould of God's Word, and so reflect the image of God; as the apostle says so beautifully, in the 6th of Romans, "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you;" or as the Greek signifies, into which you have been cast;—you have received the beautiful impress of that holy mould into which you have been cast, and come out a new image, a new fashion, with a new superscription; you belong not to the image of Satan now, but you are born again in the image of Him that begat you and created you. How beautiful a commentary on God's Word! When men are disposed to try to find fault with it, and to discover imperfections in it, how God's people should honour it, how they should cling to it, how they should maintain it, how they should exalt it, how they should cherish it! Oh there should be less of the reading of other books, and more of the study of the one blessed book of God's Word, which is ten thousand thousand times more valuable than the reading of works of vanity and fiction, which are full of emptiness, and are but as day-dreams that pass away; while the Bible, the best of books, the truth of God, "liveth and abideth for ever." If man wants to be immortal, and great, and good, let him study God's blessed Word. "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away"—"All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord

endureth for ever ;" immortal amid the mortal, vital amid the dying, unchanged amid the mutable. Trust in it, beloved ; rejoice in it—obey the truth. It is not sufficient to think what is right ; we must practise it, we must obey it. If you value the Bible, show it by obeying it ; love it, let it be before you, read it, meditate on it, let it be interwoven into the whole texture, and tenor, and conduct of your lives. It is the golden webst on which the warp of the whole web of life is wrought, continually underlying and alimending the whole conduct and composition. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ;" and then, by and by, the truth shall purify your hearts, and sanctify them, as He said who sanctifies His people, "Sanctify them through Thy truth : Thy word is truth." "Thy word," said David, "have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." Remember, there is the agent as well as the instrument, and in vain is the instrument without the agent. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"—"Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name." If, therefore, the Spirit of God works in man by the Word of God, it will not simply be a feeling, an impression, an imagination, an impulse ; nor is it by compulsion. The Spirit of God works after a reasonable and rational sort—by moral motives, by heavenly hopes and aids ; and all these are brought to bear upon man by the Word of God. He puts nothing new in ; but He brings out what before man did not feel, and appreciate, and understand. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned ;" but when the Spirit of God is effectually applied to a man's understanding, then, indeed, "the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Dear brethren, look for the Spirit

to work through the Word and by the Word, and then may we have to rejoice over you, as the apostle did over his Thessalonian children, when he said, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." And what was the consequence? their souls were purified from "dumb idols," "to serve the living and true God."

Dear brethren, the grand point is to look beyond the instrument. Though the Word is "a two-edged sword" of heavenly fabrication, it wants the Almighty hand to apply it, the mighty hammer is required to break the hard rock in pieces, the Omnipotent arm is wanted to lift it, and the heavenly unction from above is necessary to apply it to our hearts. We must ask then for the Spirit, we must wait for the Spirit, we must depend on the Spirit, and we must rest on the promises of Jesus. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

And then, brethren, we have one special result of this work, "*unfeigned love of the brethren.*" Having "purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren."—Christ tells us, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And that beloved disciple, who drank so deeply at the fountain of his Master's love, said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It is not merely love and charity to all men, but specially and specifically "love of the brethren," as brethren, because they are united to us in a new birth, and in new relationship to God, one with Him as our Father, and in blessed union with Christ, many members but one body, in blessed inhabitation of the Spirit, "the Spirit that dwelleth in you," so that the union

is from above. Ought it not to produce naturally kindly feelings? It is most unnatural, if a man loves not his brother and sister, if he loves not his father that begat him, and his mother that bare him, and more unnatural—more unpreternatural, so to speak—for those who profess to be in God to love not His people. Many of God's children when cast down and in despondency, have found it to be one of the best evidences that they love God, because they love His children with a special love, and they can say with the Psalmist, "My delight is with Thy saints upon the earth;" I feel that I can sympathize with their sorrows, and join in their joys, as I cannot even in the sorrows and joys of a father, a mother, a sister, a brother, or any earthly relation or friend. Is it not so? We must admit that it is if we are in union with the family of Christ—with those of whom He says, "They shall be mine" "when I make up my jewels." If we evince outward courtesy and kindness, what do we more than others? This yearning affection is one of the most blessed signs that a man has purified his soul by obeying the truth, and issues forth in love of the brethren. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

And then, brethren, follows the beautiful exhortation, "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." If such a change has taken place, if such a blessed work has been wrought, if such a Divine Spirit dwells in us, they follow out and follow on to their due and natural result, and we "love one another with a pure heart." See to it that you do not mistake the injunction. We are to love one another, not because some are rich and some are poor, not because some are pleasant in manner and some are uncouth, not because some are stupid and ignorant and some are enlightened and intellectual.

We must not confound the precious jewel with the metal in which the jewel is placed, even if it be in the fine gold of intellect, literature, and renown. If we admire and love these things only, what do we more than others? Is *that* an evidence of a spiritual change? No, verily! If you live in the Spirit of God, you will love the gem more than the metal in which it is set. We are to "do good unto all men," but "especially unto them who are of the household of faith," and this shall we do if the Spirit of God resteth upon us, and if we "love Him who first loved us." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." See, then, that you love one another, "fervently," and that your love is pure and unselfish, that it has no sinister motive. It must be love that approves itself to Him who searcheth the heart. It must be "for His name's sake." We must seek to give a cup of cold water in His name to His disciples. And let your "love be without dissimulation." There must be no appearance, no pretence, but the reality. And then, brethren, let it be fervent, and not cold. Men pride themselves upon their coldness and indifference in showing affection, and act upon simple intellect. But the heart must be purified as well as the mind, there must be love and life in the soul; and therefore a man is not to love coldly, not heartlessly or indifferently; he is not to say, with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" but he is to love with affection, and with a strong desire in helping another to see him prosper for eternity, and to wish to see him and to be in companionship with him in heaven; as it is said in the Book of Numbers, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Fervent love. Oh how fervent it will be in heaven, where all the tin and dross will be purged away, and the whole soul will be swallowed up in the love of God!

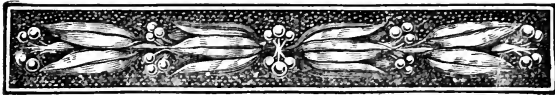
You see how beautiful and appropriate to the day is this portion of Scripture, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of

the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Oh let us seek to conquer that selfishness to which we are so prone, and which we are so unwilling to put off! Are we well for heaven? that is the great point. No selfish being will be there, for he would jar the chord of the harmony of the blessed. Let us seek to eradicate that "root of bitterness," and to break up that false image in which Satan has cast us, and let us seek to be cast anew, and to be moulded down into the mould of penitence and contrition—to be cast again into the mould of God's Word, beautifully burnished and bright in the Spirit of God, vessels meet for the Master's kingdom. If you desire to be holy and happy, set about it, not only in the name of the Lord Jesus, but in the power of the Spirit, and in obedience. Look to Jesus, that the great work may be accomplished. Look to Him in His gospel, and behold the glory of God, and seek to be "changed into the same image" by the Spirit of the Lord. You may judge materially how far the work is progressing, if you feel a growing love to the Father for Jesus' sake, and desire as you have opportunity "to do good unto all men, but especially unto them who are of the household of faith:" "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"—"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

And then, brethren, take heed that you do not go about it in your own strength and resolution. Beautiful are philanthropy, and intellectual culture, and moral training; they are all very well in their places; but there must be the power of the Spirit of God, that moved upon chaos and evolved the creation; there must be the operation of that divine Creator, who furnished the heavens and formed the earth. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Then, recollect, also, you must cultivate that Spirit; you must cherish it; you must love one another

with a pure heart fervently ; not merely when you meet together, not merely in your social endearments, not merely for convenience or for pleasure, not merely when it serves your purpose ; but see that, whatever comes, you love “without dissimulation,” without decay, and without coldness. Then, when the heavenly flame is kindled in the heart, though sometimes it may be dimmed, it will still be bright, and it will grow brighter and brighter until it blaze forth in fulness and brightness in eternity, where it shall never be shaded and never extinguished.





XXVII.

ENDURING TO THE END.

“He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”—

MATT. xxiv. 13.

It has frequently been a sight of great interest to me to watch a fleet of vessels, when the wind is favouring, gliding down the river Mersey, and going abroad upon the wide sea, each on its respective voyage. The day may have been bright, the sails are set, and all seems to be mirthful and hopeful on board; but to trace them in fancy, and to realize their various feelings, and to think of the plans and projects that are actuating them, cannot but be an object of deep and thrilling interest. Still, though in all this sight there is so much to interest, it cannot fail to cross the mind of the spectator how much they have to encounter, what risks they have to run, what difficulties they have to surmount, ere they reach the wished-for haven, and still more ere they return from the haven to that from which they are going. How many will be wrecked, how many may be drowned, how many hardships they must encounter ere they return! It must be, therefore, a still more interesting and cheerful sight to see the home-bound fleet coming up the estuary, each vessel having accomplished its course; then, indeed, we anticipate—we cannot help it—the joy of the mariners, the joy of the passengers, the joy of all, on having escaped their perils and accomplished their toils, and on being again about to rest on

the bosom of their own native land, where many hearts are throbbing to meet them, where many eyes are glistening with emotion at the anticipation of the interview, and with nothing to overcast the delight ! This is, indeed, a scene of delight and of special interest. These, too, are no inapt figures and representations of persons setting out on the Christian course, to navigate the sea of life, and so pass through all its troublesome waves, as that they may reach the haven where they shall rest for ever. It is deeply interesting to see a number of persons,—the young especially,—launching forth professing to steer by the compass of God's Spirit and by the chart of God's Word, to have the blessed Redeemer for their helmsman and their director ; and it is very delightful to think of how each is setting his prow towards the haven of eternal peace. Still it cannot but press upon one's mind, that many,—alas ! how many,—will loiter by the way ; how many will drift upon the rocks ; and how few, comparatively speaking, will make the haven in peace, and have “ an entrance ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” And very peculiarly and triumphantly cheerful it is to see,—though we are apt to overcast it with earthly sorrow and regret,—the faithful who have accomplished the fight and passed through the perils, just entering into the harbour where they shall find eternal rest. Beautifully sweet is the triumphant, and peaceful, and calm departure of the true servant of God. Instead of being a calamity, it is a blessing ; instead of being a subject of regret, it should be a subject of thanksgiving and holy joy. For this, after all, is the grand point ; it is not the launching out, it is not the setting forth ; but it is the holding out until the perils and difficulties that besiege are overcome, and the haven is reached, and there will be no more struggle with the wind and waves, for the weary are at rest. Did not Jesus say, when speaking

of how the various difficulties, and trials, and changes, that would come upon His Church after He was gone, and would dishearten and tempt men, and lead them to linger ; because “ iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold ;” but, said He—and this is a point of the deepest interest,—“ He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved :” that man has accomplished the great object of life, the one ground of his Christian profession.

Let us then call your thoughts to dwell for a little time upon this most practical and momentous subject, the grand point of all ; for we need by the Spirit of God to be strengthened, animated, and quickened, lest haply we should run in vain, and find ourselves come short of eternal life. May the Spirit of God, whose office it is to strengthen, stablish, and confirm His faithful ones, accompany His word with His own secret power and demonstration.

“ *He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.*” To endure, that is the great point. It does not simply signify that a man should hold on, but that a man should hold on in spite of, and in the face of discouragements, and difficulties, and disappointments. It is more than “dure,” it is “endure.” If a man endures, he has something to endure. It is a very great mistake for Christian people to imagine that all will be light, and liberty, and peace and joy. There are representations in the word of God of the Christian course that seem to be contrary, but they are only different aspects of the whole subject. For instance : “ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” “ Your joy no man taketh from you.” “ Rejoice in the Lord alway.” Yet, on the other hand, as we had it this morning, “ If any man will come after me, let Him take up His cross daily.” And this is not pleasant to flesh and blood. Again, we are told, “ Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” “ Strait is the gate, and narrow is the

way which leadeth unto life." Again, we are told, we must "mortify" our evil and corrupt affections; that we must "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;" that "the right hand" must be "cut off," and the "right eye plucked out," in order that we may follow and obey our Lord and Master. Now all these things are not contrary, but they are reconciled. There *is* joy, but it is joy in the midst of trouble; there *is* peace, but it is peace maintained by constant warfare; and there *is* blessed rest, but it is rest in labour and toil; the two are perfectly compatible, and the man who does not look at both sides, takes but an imperfect view. There is to the cloud a dark side and a bright side; and a man has to recollect the lust that is still in the flesh. While this lasts he must still have a dark side. Perfect fulness and joy are reserved for the future. A man gets foretastes here, but he does not get fulness till he gets there. He must, therefore, sit down and "count the cost," before he begins to build his house. He must ascertain what his strength and power are to resist the enemy, before he goes out to the battle; he must remember that he has pledged himself to fight "against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end;" and if he has so pledged himself, is it not a battle in which a man has to encounter a great deal that tries his nerve, and his courage, and spirit? is it not one in which he must put forth all his energy, and stand to his post, and seek to overcome? If we have a battle to fight, if we have a race to run, if we have a building to erect, it must be with toil, and trouble, and effort. We shall have to "endure to the end." It will not avail to be constant and enduring in the outset, but we must endure to the end. We have a great deal to endure in privations, in difficulties, in our various posts in life, in our friendships, in our relationships. Many will try to prevent our following the Lord fully, they will try to discourage us. There are many men who have no root;

they endure for a season, but in time of temptation, when they are reproached by others, they become faint and draw back. And do we not find many oftentimes gradually get so immersed in the cares and relationships of life, that though they seem to endure for a time, they do not hold on, they relax in prayer, in Christian duty, they are less constant in their attendance in the house of God, less constant at the table of the Lord; they gradually lose their "first love," and become cold, and then at last they wither and return to the world, they draw back and make shipwreck of their faith and hope. And then, too, do we not find very many, from following into different companies, and amongst gay, thoughtless, and worldly companionships, get absorbed in the vortex of life, their holiness is gone, they tumble down in the mire, their hope is withered, and passes away as a dream. Then, again, are there not very many who get into some peculiar state of trial from persecution or reproach, or something they did not count upon; they are ashamed of Jesus, they are ashamed of the cross, and so they betray the Master with a kiss. Then, again, how many are disheartened and discouraged with the struggle in their own hearts. They set out with much emotion, but feeling too little faith, and they resolve to have it by and by; but when they find the "clouds return after the rain," the old man again putting forth new endeavours when they thought he had been crucified, and altogether dead; when they find that he still lingers around them, and that they do not attain to that assurance of peace that they expected: when it seems to them that their struggles do but make the enemy the stronger—they get offended, and discouraged, and disheartened; their "hands hang down," their knees become feeble, and they turn their backs. How many things lead a man to come short of eternal life! We have it in the lesson of this morning, how Christ was encompassed by one and another, almost persuaded to follow Him, but not

altogether. He could expect none to follow Him but the man who "put his hand to the plough," looking straight forward, drawing a straight furrow, with no time or inclination to glance behind him, but still "forgetting the things behind" him, "pressing forward to the things before" him. He that "endures to the end," who in spite of sorrow and temptation, in spite of the reproach of the world, and the denial of his own unbelieving heart, in spite of all that he meets with to dishearten him and discourage him—of fears within and fightings without—still holds on, that is the man who shall be saved. Let us not mistake it, brethren, it is not he that comes short, or turns back after all, but he that "endures to the end," that is the man who enters in ; and instead of leading a man to repose in confidence, it will lead a man who holds the truth in simplicity, to be doubly earnest and anxious that he may still hold on, and have a confident assurance and a blessed hope, that he is preserved to eternal life. A man has no right to be sure that he is safe, but as he is walking with God faithfully and diligently, it may be with much fear, and discouragement, and doubt, but still he holds on and holds fast. It is, perhaps, more beautiful to see a man in little comfort and darkness holding on, than one who walks in the full sunshine. Job was able to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Was not that a beautiful instance of enduring to the end? When he was stripped of everything,—without were fightings, and within were fears; clouds, and tribulations, and adversity were about him ;—yet he says, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" I will still cling to Him, and in the midst of all He will support me ; nothing shall separate me from my God, none shall pluck me out of His hand. He that thus endures to the end shall be saved. There is no doubt or uncertainty there. You may say, perhaps, were not they saved when it is said they turned and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes ; but we must recollect that salvation in this

sense includes man's deliverance from weakness, and blindness, and doubt, and fear, and Satan, and the world, and the flesh; but full salvation is "in body, soul, and spirit," when complete in the fulness of God; and we are thus taught to look to Jesus, who will appear "the second time without sin unto salvation,"—complete salvation.

Salvation from guilt is but part of salvation. No one wishes to be saved from punishment but desires to be holy, as He is holy, that we may purify ourselves even as He is pure, so that when we enter that life we may behold Him, when we "awake up after His likeness." We have not full salvation now; it is in progress, it is not complete; it is the man that endures to the end that attains the full recompence, and enters into the joy of the Lord; or, as our prayer at the funeral of one who dies in the Lord so beautifully says, he gains "perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in God's eternal and everlasting glory." Then a man has full salvation; therefore, brethren, as we would not be almost, but altogether saved, and partake of that "fulness of joy for evermore," we "must endure to the end." This is the great purpose and end. We do not set out on a voyage just for the purpose of setting out; we have to seek to reach the haven. We do not cover ourselves in armour simply for the sake of being ready for the battle, but that we may fight and win the victory, and gain the crown; therefore, after all, this is the grand test of our having true faith in Christ, that we continue in Christ, that we abide as branches in the vine, and bear fruit. How much blossom of promise there is that has no measure of fruit? Let us never forget that there may be a good deal of seeming fruit; but if it does not last, if it drops off, it is because it is worthless, rotten at the core. You sometimes see under a fruit tree the ground strewn with fallen fruit. Somebody may say, per-

haps, some great storm has passed over, or some sudden frost, when probably the truth has been that the fruit itself was unsound at the core, and that, therefore, it rotted and fell off. Brethren, it is so with the fruits that grow in the orchard of God ; many are fair and seeming good to the sight, but they are not sound at the core. The proof that they are sound is, that they still cling to the tree and ripen, until, as it is beautifully said, "the righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And, therefore, I conjure my brethren, more especially my younger friends, when they do indeed set out in the Christian life, as they are bound and covenanted to do, that they should do it heartily and at once, that they should not keep back any part of the price. There should be no reserve ; they must not say, thus far will we go and no further, but this we cannot give up ; there must be no reserve or holding back from God, sacrifice all if it is in the way of your being happy, and then you shall not "come short of the glory of God" if you hold on to the end, leaving the world's shoal, leaving it to return no more, turning your back on the flesh and the devil, never parleying but making your decision at once. And then, remember, you belong to another Master. You have taken up the cross ; act up to it then, and cling to it ; be not ashamed of it, and then He will not be ashamed of you in the presence of angels and archangels.

And, remember, when you have set out upon the way, difficulties will meet you and cross your path. You may go on smoothly and comfortably for a long time ; but, remember, the dark days *will* come, the clouds *will* gather, the storms *will* rage, you must expect it, you must look for it ; but do not be disappointed or disheartened, for no "strange thing" will have happened unto you. The same thing has happened

in all ages. Read the Bible, read the martyrologies, read the history of the Church of God in all ages, and you will find that the faithful ones have ever been tried. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in my kingdom." "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers," and "against spiritual wickedness in high places." "Put on, therefore, the whole armour of God." "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Is He not able who has called you to make you "more than conquerors through Him that loved you?" And, dear brethren, be jealous of yourselves; be watchful against declensions; guard against symptoms that indicate atrophy of the spirit, the cancer of the inner man. These things come on slowly. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways;" therefore, we ought to be more jealous of what the symptoms are. If a man finds secret cancer, or symptoms of dropsy creeping on, or his heart is impeded or impaired in its action, or some latent disease indicating through pressure on his brain, that his memory is leaving him, and his mind is darkening, what efforts he will make—how he will have recourse to the physicians, and spend all that he has upon them if, haply, he may avert the symptoms; and should we not be more alive to the diseases within us, when we find that we do not love prayer; that we have no relish for the house of God; that we have no communion with God; that we have no delight in His courts and in His ordinances? How we ought to be alive to these symptoms, which, though invisible, are not the less real! Could they but stand out before us; could we but watch them, and feel their pulse, and see them, we should perhaps, because they were palpable, be more alive to such changes. But are these changes the less real, because we cannot see them with our

eyes? The reality is the inner man, the immortal man, and all the rest is but a shell and a mere shadow. We ought then to "count all things but dung that we may win Christ and be found in Him;" and then if we endure to the end, "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,"—if, indeed, nothing shall "separate us from the love of God," then we shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, and amid the fulness and consummation of our blessedness we shall say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."





XXVIII.

THE ARGUMENT FOR A JUDGMENT TO COME.

“Prepare to meet thy God.”—AMOS iv. part of 12.

WE do not so much need to learn or to hear new truths as to realize old truths, which we admit. It is in vain that we admit if we do not embrace, and embrace so as to carry out into our daily life. Who is there that denies that he must soon die? He would be a fool, and fit for a place in an asylum, who should gravely attempt to deny it; and yet, how few live as though they believed it! How little difference it would make with very many if it were not to be so! They might be a little more reckless and abandoned, but the change in their course of conduct would be small. And yet death is continually among them and around them, death is already at work in many, and even now they feel that the seeds of death are sown in their constitutions. Some are in the course of death from their mothers' womb; others have that latent distemper gnawing at their vitals which, could they but discern, they would perceive is the immediate harbinger and herald of their departure. Which of us has not had death within our own walls; which of us has not stood beside the deathbed, and watched the awful last struggle and fearful stillness; which of us that hears continually the tolling bell that

“Speaks the departure of a soul,”

and says to each one, “It may be for thee next;” which of us

—I trust there is none—would gravely deny that death issues in life's existence—immediate existence—for blessedness inconceivable, or woe unutterable? And yet do we not each one need to have the warning voice breathed and continually echoed in our ears; do we not each one of us need to have said to us; and should not each one say to his own soul, "Prepare to meet thy God?"

God must be met in judgment:—there is a preparation that we should make to meet Him:—that preparation ought to be the chief object of life. May God by His Spirit solemnize our minds, and lead us to give our whole hearts to the great end of being found ready when our Master calls us away!

God must be met in judgment. That we must die needs not to be proved. It were as well to prove that we have light in day, that we have darkness in night. The one is just as superfluous as the other. But after death is the judgment; that is the grand point! Surely the providence of God indicates it to every man who has an eye to see, and a mind to understand. By the providence of God I mean, that course of divine administration by which God governs the affairs of this lower world. He guides and governs in a moral sort all the children of men, for though it is true this is not a world of retribution, but of probation, yet there is enough of retribution in this world to tell a man that there is a moral law of God, and that He will at last enforce that moral law by enforcing and fulfilling the sanctions which He has attached to it. For judgment has begun. There is a certain amount of just and fearful administration of God's punishment, and of God's mercy and grace, going on in the midst of the world; and if men are dead to it, and blind to it, it is because they are willingly blind and morally dead. But he who observes the past as it is recorded for our learning, and the present as it is placed before our eyes; he who watches it in the individual, and he who watches it in the community; he who

watches it on the wide scale, and he who watches it upon the narrow scale, gathers continually evidence that "Verily there is a reward for the righteous: doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth." It is true that the righteous oftentimes seem to be oppressed, persecuted, forsaken, and destitute, and the wicked triumph and appear to be successful; but "they have their reward," they have their portion in this world. Is it not true, on the other hand, that there are frequent interpositions of judgment? Have we not heard and read of retribution on guilty nations, of retribution on cruel, bad, blaspheming tyrants; of interpositions, such as liars being smitten down with the lie trembling on the tongue, of the blasphemer struck at once to hell? We have only to go to the authentic record—and what can be so authentic as the inspired record?—to find such illustrations. Have we not heard and read of the world being swept with the besom of the deluge, because of its abominable wickedness? have we not read and heard of the cities that had given "themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh," being carried down direct to "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" for ever? And is there not a moral retribution of a more constant and certain kind? are not the wicked self-punished, and the bad self-tormented? have they not oftentimes in the wretchedness of their families, and the ruin of their connections, and the desolation that befalls them, in the utter abandonment and wreck of all they have set their hearts upon, a fearful proof that God does behold the wicked with abhorrence, and that he will surely punish their iniquity? And do we not find, on the other hand, how God favours the just? Have we not had a blessed instance in which, while He swept the world with the deluge, He prepared the ark for the saving of the faithful few? Is there no distinction here between God's enemies and God's servants? Have we not heard and read of how angels guided, and led, and quickened the steps

of two or three who were found in abandoned Sodom, "faithful amid the faithless," of how God could not destroy the city till they were secure? Have we not read and heard of how God in the wilderness, while He sent plague upon plague, and judgment upon judgment, on the murmuring, repining, and unbelieving multitude, yet called out and preserved Joshua and Caleb, because there was another spirit in them, and because they feared the Lord? Are not the authentic records replete with instances in which God has interposed for His people, in which He has guarded, guided, and blessed them? and is there not here a moral retribution going on as well as in the case of the wicked, so that in the present life even they have a "just recompense of reward?" Are not they who serve Him happy in His service, are they not blessed in His favour, is there no evidence that He loves the righteous and that He hates the wicked, is there no evidence that He is against the ungodly and for the godly? Will it be said, "Ay, but has He not left His people to cruel torments, to the stake, to the dungeon, and to the rack? Why did he not interpose, where was His hand here? Was *this* retribution, was *this* justice?" "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Instead of the way in which the wicked often prosper, and "there are no bands in their death;" instead of the way in which the persecutor oftentimes is exalted and magnified, while the poor persecuted martyr is insulted and tormented; instead of this being any weakening of the argument from which we derive our belief in the judgment to come, it is, in the wondrous and mysterious course of God's providence, the most powerful argument—or rather confirmation of the argument—that there must be a judgment to come; for if the righteous were always rewarded, or if the wicked were always punished here, it would seem that there were no need of future punishment and reward, and in the strange mingling chaotic we might almost show mistrust of the government of the Infinitely

Wise, and Just, and Good. Were there no judgment to come, then, indeed, we might suppose that God was neither good nor evil; that He heeded us not, but left the world to its own course; and all was confusion, and vanity, and fatuity, and accident. The argument for the judgment to come is all the stronger because there is an unseen retribution to tell us that God is just, and that hereafter we must meet our final destiny and doom at the solemn reckoning and assize, when "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." There the tyrant and the slave, the persecutor and the martyr, the outraged and the outrager, the man who hath blasphemed God and the man who hath adored Him and served Him, shall stand before him, and every one shall "receive the things done in his body."

But if the course of Providence indicates that there is a judgment to come where we must all meet God, surely the voice of conscience echoes the voice of Providence, and whispers to man, in a way that sometimes makes the stoutest hearts tremble, and sometimes cheers and comforts the most drooping spirits of the servants of God, that there is a day yet to come when we must all appear before God, and God will deal with all according to His eternal justice and truth. Yes, brethren, there *is* a conscience in a man. There are some foolish and vain philosophers, who will tell us that conscience is the effect of custom, that it is the result of superstition, that it springs from early impressions made upon the mind. Such men know not what they speak. Go where you will, to the darkest of human kind, or to the most refined, and you will find traces of conscience in all. There is a natural instinct and tendency that only needs to be awakened. It exists; a universal capacity and tendency to conscience. There are few indeed so stupid, so brutalized, and so ration-

ally insensible but they have a conscience, and recognize it. There is a line of demarcation between crime and virtue, and conscience "accuses or excuses" them before God. I believe we know comparatively little of the working of conscience, except that we can infer what will be the working in others by the working in ourselves. The secret tribunals set up in men's breasts, the judge enthroned there, and the laws enforced there; these are not cognizable by the eyes of men. "What man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" But there are many outward manifestations of the working within; there are many indications that a man may be most wretched in the midst of all the world counts prosperity; and that he may be very joyful and happy in the midst of the most excruciating agony, and the sorest desolation and privation. There are many indications that, after all, the world within is that which makes or mars a man, and that misery or blessedness are more the result of that little world within, and its state and condition, than of all the circumstances of the big world around us. Nothing can make a man truly happy who is miserable in his conscience. Does not even a child show early indications of conscience, for when he is going to do what his little conscience tells him is wrong, he is a coward, he is afraid; though no human eye sees him, yet he trembles, for the Great Eye is upon him, and he has some sense of it. Yes, brethren, there *is* a conscience in man, and that conscience is God's own witness that He has begun to judge within, and that He will finally and fully judge hereafter.

And, doubtless, when we take the voice of conscience in harmony with the voice of Providence, even if there were no revelation from God, it would, to a great extent, prove and manifest that we must meet our God in judgment; that there is, however we may forget it or deny it, a book of record kept, and that all the deeds of mankind, secret and open, hidden and manifest, shall be laid bare before the

assembled universe. But we are not left to the indications of Providence, or to the less distinct indications of conscience, to prove the fact, or to be assured on a subject so profoundly and eternally involving the interests of us all. God hath "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." He has given to us the record of His Word so plain, that "he that runs may read;" and if there is one truth more abundantly proclaimed, and illustrated, and enforced than another, it is that great truth, that there is a day which God has appointed, "in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

By line upon line, by assurance upon assurance, from the time of Enoch, down to the closing of the Book of Revelation, the testimony is borne, that as infallibly as there is a God, as infallibly as He has made us, and as infallibly as He reigns over us, so infallibly will He reckon with us. There is no escape there. Who shall hide himself from the Omnipotent? who shall escape from the reach of the Almighty Arm? who shall refuse the summons of the last trump? who shall refuse to hear the voice of the archangel, the great shout that shall awake the universe? who shall refuse? What can be more clear language than this? "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." "The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." "Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." "I saw

the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." "Behold, He cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see Him." "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory : And before him shall be gathered all nations : and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats : And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal."

Could there be a chain to prove more fully, more clearly, more conclusively than the providence of God, the testimony of conscience, and the grand and full demonstration of the word of revelation furnish, the great fact that we must meet our God in judgment ? We have no choice, no alternative. If a man can refuse to die, he may have some reason to think he can refuse to be judged ; but if there never yet was a man, since Adam's fall, who could resist death ; then, there never was a man who will be able to resist judgment, or fail to be found there. It is not a matter left to our own choice. Ah ! how gladly would the infidel, the atheist, the ungodly, the blasphemer, the drunkard, the impure, the covetous, the proud, the haughty, the malignant, the revengeful, refuse to be judged, if they could ! But, brethren, there is no escape from that Omniscient Eye that searcheth all things ; yea, "the depths of hell ;" "for the sea shall give up the dead which are in it ; the grave shall give up the dead which are in it ; and death and hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them ;" and all shall stand before the Judge of the quick and the dead.

Brethren, do not let us think to lose ourselves in the number. Countless as will be the multitude that must come to hear the final sentence, each one will feel as if he is all alone ; each one will have his own conscious being concentrated on his own state, on his own destiny. Let each one, then, say to himself, "I shall be there ; prepare my soul to meet Him."

There is a preparation we should make to meet God.—That is the grand lesson. One would imagine that merely the announcement that man has to meet his God, would be sufficient to set him at once to say "I ought to be getting ready. What is before me? what have I to expect? how am I to stand before God? what shall I plead for myself? how shall I be able to encounter the awful Eye that searches all things? what shall I do to meet Him in peace?" Now, brethren, that we ought to prepare is clear ; for we are not naturally prepared. If men were all ready, they would have no need to make any effort to get ready ; and if Adam had never fallen, and men were un-fallen beings, to meet God would be joy, and hope, and blessed expectation, and we should have nothing to do but just to live on as we come into the world, and follow the instincts of a pure nature, the dictates of a clear conscience, the directions of an unbiassed and undimmed reason, and the impulses of a pure and holy heart. Oh, blessed state ! Then, indeed, we should look forward to meet God as meeting our Father ; death would have no sting, because no terror ; we should long to have the door opened, and hear the voice that will welcome us to our Father's house. But, brethren, it is not by nature that we can ever come to that state. If a man follows the dictates and impulses of his own heart, and walks in the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, and wishes to get absorbed in what is around him, what preparation is there there? Read impartially God's own words,—the words by which you will be judged ;—read impartially and carefully what are the tests and proofs of being prepared to meet God, and then, if

you can think yourselves naturally prepared to meet Him, you are under the darkest delusion, for if one thing is more clear than another in the Word of God, it is that the natural heart and the mind of God are in opposition, insomuch that "the carnal mind is enmity against God." This seems hard to many, and they flatter and deceive themselves; but let them remember that they will not have to deal with their own deceitful hearts, or with the god of this world, who deceives and deludes, but that they will have to deal with a God from whom there is no escape, no subterfuge, no shelter, and no excuse; each man will have to give account of himself to God, and therefore we are not prepared. If we want an evidence, even without the Bible, why is the thought of being near to God, who came to save us, dreadful? why do we shrink from what is after death? why these forebodings and misgivings? why do men try to banish the thought of death? why do men find they cannot be cheerful, and glad, and merry, without forgetting death, and eternity, and God, and judgment? Whence these fears? why these misgivings? why these apprehensions and shrinkings? why the terror of death that often seizes upon a man in the midst of all his gaiety, and jollity, and blasphemy? Why? Brethren, be assured of it, it is not merely that a man is thus unwilling to meet God, but there is an inconveniency between him and what he is taught God is; he has a sense of recoiling from a holy God. Now, brethren, is this the state in which to meet Him? Blessed be God, we ought to prepare to meet Him; for He has provided a way for us. It would be in vain for a man to set about it if it were a hopeless task; but he does not deal with us as the hard tyrant dealt with the oppressed Israelites, bidding them make bricks but giving them no straw. He does not bid us prepare to meet Him, and not put us in the way in which we may prepare.

If there is one argument more powerful than another to

induce men to set about that preparation, it is that they know "their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Are they guilty, and need to have their guilt done away ere they can stand before the judgment seat in peace? Has He not laid that guilt upon His only Son, that He might bear our sin, and we receive His righteousness; that judgment might embrace mercy, and man stand before the judgment seat acquitted on the ground of perfect righteousness, and perfect justice, so that justice shall not be less satisfied in the acquittal of those that are found in Jesus, than it shall be justified in the condemnation and eternal retribution of those that are not found in Jesus? "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him;" that he might present us "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." Are we at variance with the nature, and purity, and holiness of God? Has He not provided a sanctifying Spirit? has He not given us in the covenant of His grace, a pledge that His Spirit shall be given to all that ask of Him? The man that is born from above is born with a heavenly nature, meet for the heavenly inheritance, in holy communion with God. Then, indeed, when a man is thus born anew, he will have the evidence of his new birth, and bring forth "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God;" all his evil deeds that in the past have been written against him, are now blotted out, and all his good efforts, present and future, will be inscribed in the book of account, as proofs to be brought forth in the great day. "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or

naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And then, brethren, a man's whole life is a preparation to meet his God. He sets before him the final judgment; he lives to die that he may die to live for ever; he makes a conscience and an account of his thoughts, and motives, and words, and works, and seeks that they may be all done for God and to God, so that when he stands before Him, and the books are opened, there may be found there deeds of righteousness in the justifying evidences of His justification; "not," as some one has well said, "to go before Him to justify, but to follow the justifying," to prove that he was in Christ, that the old things are passed away, and that all things are become new.

We can but glance for a moment at what might well occupy our entire attention. *This preparation should be the chief object of life.* Ought it not to be? Why do we live? what do we live for? what are we here for? what are we spared for? what are we continued in health for? Is it to amuse ourselves? is it to please ourselves? is it to live as we list, thoughtless, heedless, careless, following after the bubble of pleasure? is it that we may "eat and drink, for to-morrow we die?" is it for men to get on in life, to attain power and position which, after all, is but a mere mist, that may be gone before to-morrow's sun rises? Is it that we may say to our souls, "Thou hast much goods laid up," when, perhaps, the voice is already breaking upon our ears, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" No, my brethren; we are here to prepare for hereafter; we are here on the education of life, that will prepare us for the life eternal; we are here that we may make our election between God and Satan, holiness and sin, heaven and hell; we are here for this,

and it is here, or never: "Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." Here all is ready; for it is the declaration of Christ, "Come, for all things are ready." The Father is ready, who beholds the prodigal son a great way off; the Son, who was sent to seek and to save the lost, is ready; the Spirit, that strives and influences the inclinations of man to believe, is ready; angels are ready to string their harps for joy that another sinner returns; the mansions are ready in the house of God to receive the prepared penitent and prodigal returning to the Father; the Church is ready, prepared with its ordinances; the minister is ready with his ministrations, to aid, and assist, and succour in the preparation to meet God—all things are ready. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"—"The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Surely then, brethren, it should be the great work of life! Will it hinder any other work that is good or right? will it take away from man's happiness, or peace, or security, and comfort, to be at peace with God, and to have the great work going on; and to be assured that, if death come "at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning," it would not take him off his guard or confound him? Oh! let a man have peace with God, and all is peace; let him have peace with death, then he has peace with everything. It will not make our pleasure more sad, but our pain more easy to bear—the rough path will be smoothed, and the crooked made straight. Surely that will give a man music in the midst of discord, joy in the midst of sorrow, hope on the bed of sickness, calmness in the valley of death, then "all things are yours, and ye are Christ's," all things then work together for your good. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and

all that is good for you will be added. "Prepare, then, to meet thy God."

And surely, brethren, it is time. When God is taking from among us relations and friends, when many of us see mourners going about the streets, ourselves oftentimes in sable attire, that tells of another grave opened, of another soul ushered into the presence of God, this solemn warning ought not to be forgotten by us! Let us not forget it when we go into our closets, and when we go to our beds; but let each one say to himself, "By the help of God, I will prepare to meet my God; I will keep this before me; it shall be the great end of my life." Do not think it will turn you gloomy, that it will turn you from real peace and pleasure, from real progress in aught that is good? Far from it; it will give reality, truth, and zest to all, for a man who is prepared to meet his God is prepared to meet everything: and the man who is not prepared to meet his God is not prepared to meet anything. Dear brethren, let us then most simply and humbly go first as penitents to the cross of Jesus, and seek of Him the obliteration of the long score that stands against us for the past; and let us seek that "renewal in the spirit of our mind," that perpetual indwelling of his good Spirit, that shall enable us to live and so to labour, that our living and labouring shall not be "in vain in the Lord."





XXIX.

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection.”—
PHILIPPIANS iii. part of 10.

IN studying the Word of God, I have often been struck with the prominence which the great doctrine, that we this day* keep in mind, holds in the writings of the inspired apostles, as compared with the want of prominence that it holds in the minds and hearts—and administrations, I might say—of the Church in the present day. The grand point that the apostles proclaimed was not simply Jesus crucified, but Jesus risen and glorified. The former was the laying of the stone, the latter was the bringing forth of the corner-stone with shoutings of “Grace, grace unto it.” When the Spirit was poured upon them from on high, we read, that “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ;” and, as a consequence, “great grace was upon them all.” It is to be feared that many who hold and admit the truth, do not realize its preciousness and its power. It does not impress their minds with that assurance, it does not convey to their hearts that support and consolation, it does not inspire their minds with that bright hope and glorious expectation, which it used to do the hearts and minds of the primitive believers in Christ Jesus. Yet it ought to do so. The truth is not changed, the momentousness of the truth is not abated, the efficacy of the truth is not in any wise ex-

* Easter Sunday Morning, 1865.

tenuated. The change is not in the truth, it is in us; the fault is not in the truth, it is in us. It is well, therefore, and wise of our Church to bring before us this great truth most specially on this great day, the Lord's day, the mother of Christian Sabbaths, the beginning to us, as it were, of the Christian dispensation, for it was opened completely on this day.

I beseech, therefore, brethren, your earnest and deep attention whilst I call your thoughts to this remarkable expression used by the apostle in describing the work of grace in his own heart, teaching us how he came from counting anything better than Christ, to "count all things but dung," so that he knew Him, how he carried out this conviction and decision, and desired to know, with experimental application to his own heart, the love of Christ, and "the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

"*The power of his resurrection:*"—*how we are to know that power.*—To "know Him and the power of His resurrection." These are the two aspects of the subject that will be fully brought before our minds. Let us look to God that, through His Spirit, we may know "the power of His resurrection," not to our condemnation, for He has risen to judge, but for our salvation, for He has risen to justify.

The power of Christ's resurrection:—its power in our *justification*—its power in our *sanctification*—its power in our *consolation*—its power in our *anticipation*. In all these views there is a power in the resurrection, which, though it is not adequately realized, is past understanding.

The power of Christ's resurrection in our *justification*.—Our justification is the hinge of all our deliverance. Salvation begins in justification. Until a man have justification, what has he? No peace with God, no release from his guilt, no acceptance before the Judge, no title to heaven. The blessed Redeemer came, therefore, primarily and pre-eminently to undertake our justification, to pay the debt that we could

never pay, to make the satisfaction we could never make, to render it compatible with the unchangeable and immutable justice and law of His moral government, that we should be received back unto the Father, not on the ground of simple forgiveness, but on the ground of justification, which is more than forgiveness. You may forgive a man—he is not justified on that account alone; but if you impart, impute, and provide for him, in some way, complete satisfaction and reparation, then you justify him; the man is not simply forgiven, but he is approved, acquitted, and accepted. And so, in the salvation of Jesus, it is not a partial one; it is not by setting aside or lowering the law, but by satisfying the law; it is not by doing away with man's desert, but by supplying what man could not himself supply, and without which he could never be just before God. And all this was completed, as on this day, when Christ rose again. No words more briefly and tersely express the idea than the closing words of the chapter, ending with this remarkable summing up, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." "Delivered for our offences," our surety arrested, for we had nothing to pay; arrested to pay with his own precious blood what we have merited and incurred; yea, confined in the prison-house of the grave, to one who was under sentence of death. As far as the result, there was not as yet any acquittal of the debt imputed to Him, and on account of which He suffered and was buried. But he was "raised again for our justification." God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost united in that wondrous work of resurrection, and proclaimed it to the moral universe that debt was paid, our offence was propitiated, for our guilt was done away in the work of Christ, and we were set free; so that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." And so complete is this effect of Christ's resurrection, that the Apostle Paul grounds upon it the highest assurance of the believer; for he says, "Who shall lay anything to the charge

of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, and is even at the right hand of God." He died; He was "delivered for our offences;" yea rather—*i.e.*, more emphatically and transcendently still—"was raised again for our justification." I trust you see, then, brethren, the power of Christ's resurrection in our justification. If He had not risen, we are not justified. He must die—that is essential, for "without shedding of blood is no remission;" but He must rise, or the work was incomplete, the broad seal of the Eternal was not set upon the free pardon bestowed upon us by His sovereign grace through his Son, that it might be in perfect harmony with His own moral perfections.

The power of Christ's resurrection is further seen in our *regeneration and sanctification*, for "no man hath quickened his own soul." If any man is quickened effectually, it is by the grace and through the power of the Spirit. "We are born again," as it is said, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And, said Jesus himself, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." If Christ, then, had not risen, the Spirit of Christ would not have come, and man would not have had that next best gift to the Son himself, the Spirit that makes the Son known to the sinner, and makes Him effectual to his salvation. So that the resurrection was essential, in order to our being raised morally "from the death of sin to the life of righteousness;" as is beautifully represented to us in our baptismal service, where the sponsors are thus addressed:—"Remembering always, that Baptism doth represent unto us our profession; which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him; that as He died, and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from

sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." Had not Christ risen then, none would have been effectually renewed and sanctified, and so made meet for the heavenly inheritance; for it is through Him we "have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

The power of Christ's resurrection is further manifested in our *consolation and hope*.—The apostle gives this very plainly and simply indeed in the fourth chapter of the 1st of Thessalonians, where he says:—"I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." You see the hope of the sleeping dead in Christ is bound up with the assurance of Christ's death and resurrection; for He Himself says, "Because I live, ye shall live also;" and if He did not live, what hope or certainty would there be that His people should live? But it is a glorious doctrine of our faith that the body as well as the soul is ransomed, and both shall alike set forth the praises of the great salvation when, as our Church piously expresses it, we shall "have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Christ's eternal and everlasting glory." That great and strong consolation it gives, that "we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us," that hope is bound up with the resurrection of Jesus. If He had not risen, His people would not rise; but since He has risen, His people *must* rise. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man,"—the first fallen father—"came death, by man"—the second federal Head, which is the Lord from heaven—"came also the resurrection of the dead."

And so, brethren, has the blessed Redeemer, therefore,

through the power of His resurrection, given the elevating principle that lifts up His people in *anticipation*, in heart, in blessed Spirit, and comfort, as they pass along the wilderness. It is His being there that leads them to set their affections on things above; for, as it is so beautifully expressed in the Epistle to the Colossians, "Ye are dead,"—morally, spiritually, "with Christ, and your life"—new life, heavenly life—is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is "our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." "Mortify then your members which are upon the earth;" "Crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts;" have "your treasure" "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God;" "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The moral magnet, that draws up the groveling affections and hopes of man from earth to heaven, is Christ crucified. "I," said Jesus, "if I be lifted up from earth, will draw all men unto me." And not simply is this fulfilled in that He was lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent, by being lifted up to the cross; He is also lifted up to the throne. We are not to seek the living amongst the dead: "He is not here; He is risen." Therefore, we are to look to "Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." And what is the Christian's confidence and comfort? That He is lifted up, that He is risen, that He is elevated, and "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet."—"Every knee must bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So that, you see, brethren, how His resurrection is bound up with all our salvation, how the whole were imperfect, how the whole chain were fractured, unless the last living truth consummated the whole. There is a beautiful concatenation throughout the work of Christ, and the last link that fastens the chain on the throne of the Eternal is, perhaps, the most vital of all; for it is the consummation of the whole.

Time will not allow us to dwell at any length upon *our knowing the power of His resurrection*; yet do not go away with the idea, that this is not to us individually the grand point, the turning point, the decisive point. What avails admitting that he is risen? The man must be a very strange man, and know very little of evidence, who does not admit that. One of our wisest judges has left it on record, that no fact decided in a court of justice has had such a mass of moral evidence to prove and confirm it as the fact of Christ's resurrection. But the mere theoretic admission of the fact, of what avail is it? It only tends to our condemnation. We must know the *power* of His resurrection; know it by our being justified, and seeing that His resurrection gives hope and assurance, and comfort to our justification; know it by its power in our sanctification: "I was dead, but I am alive again; I was lost, but I am found." I was blind, but now I see; I was far off from God, but now I am brought nigh by the blood of Christ; I was fleshy, earthly, sensual; now, through God's Spirit, I am "spiritually minded, which is life and peace;" and I mind the things of the Spirit, instead of minding, as I once did exclusively, the things of the flesh. This is proof to me that "my Redeemer liveth," and that He has manifested His life in me. As Job so beautifully said: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." And then, brethren, to know the consolation and hope of His resurrection as we stand by the graveside, to commit the dust of some one whom we have loved best on earth to its kindred dust! Does not the eye of faith behold the rainbow that encircles the sepulchrè, and tells us we do not commit them, or sorrow over them, as those who have no hope in heaven, who know nothing of Christ's salvation; that we do not sorrow as those of old who were without

hope, who expressed their grief by tearing their hair, and cutting their flesh, and lying down in sackcloth and ashes. What was the power of Christ's resurrection to them? It was doubt, conjecture, a maze, and darkness. The many monuments they have left of their dead, the Etrurian urns and monumental sculptures, all tell of despair. There is the shattered pillar, the trodden, trampled flower, but nothing of the glorious resurrection to come. Not so ought Christians to mourn; not so ought they to gather around the grave; but "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the beautiful hope expressed in our church funeral-service, when we stand around the grave, and we commit the body of some dear sister or brother departed to the dust "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."

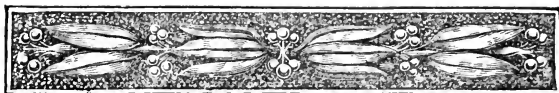
Then, brethren, do *we* know this power? do *we* find this comfort and support in our trials? And then we are to know this more gloriously yet; but that has to come when He "shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself;" "then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!" Why is this, and how is it? Because Jesus has risen. There is the glorious demonstration of the whole; there is the key-stone of the arch of our hope.

Then, brethren, ought we not to be joyful and thankful this day that "the Lord is risen indeed?" ought we not to be filled with love, and wonder, and praise at the glorious fact? We are so morally insensible, and we so little comprehend these great truths, that we need, indeed, to be stirred up—to stir up ourselves—to far greater efforts. The ancient Christians, when they met in the streets, or in solemn assemblies, on this day cried out with holy joy, "The Lord is

risen indeed !” and should we not have the same comfort, and hope, and consolation, and fellowship, and praise? Dear brethren, what a comfort to us in mourning that we have not to mourn as those without hope! We have seen many scenes of mourning, some of the most trying character to flesh and blood; but there comes a beam from heaven to the death chamber that is illumined by the hope of Christ’s resurrection when nothing else can light up the prospect.

And, in coming to the holy communion, come not simply with the death, but also the resurrection, of Christ before the eye of your soul. He presides at His board, He himself dispenses the memorials of His death and resurrection, and “as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come;” and then, “every eye shall see Him,” and all shall acknowledge—God grant that it may not be in the anguish of despair, but in the transport of victory—that “the Lord is risen indeed.”





XXX.

HEAVENLY REST.

“Ye shall find rest unto your souls.”—St. MATTHEW xi. part of 29.

THE great thing that man wants is rest. He is, naturally, a restless being ; he is surrounded by everything that is fit to make him restless. All is uncertainty and passing away ; all are rushing on into a dread unknown eternal ; and man is feeling that he is dying, yet he is living, and he must live for ever. Man is surrounded with ten thousand dangers ; he is not able to protect himself ; he is exposed to perpetual disappointments ; he is not sufficient in himself to help himself ; he is a poor, dependent creature. He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower ; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.”

Where is he to find rest ? There is a very simple test furnished to us in the brief and experimental truth of the Word of God, if man will but make proof of it and try it ; and if men do not try it, what fools they make of themselves, what a fearful fatal mistake they are guilty of ! Let them put Christ to the test, not in the way of tempting Him, but in the way of trusting Him. What He says to the restless man in His Word is this : “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Let a man try it, and find rest ; then, does he not know that the Word of God is true, and “endureth for ever ;” does he not know that the Saviour’s

word cannot be broken ; does he not carry the witness—the evidence—in his own soul that Christ is faithful, for he has proved His faithfulness, and therefore he can repose upon it, come what may, pass away whatever must, in this vain world.

These beautiful words of promise challenge our earnest attention. Surely there is no man, woman, or child, if he has any thought or feeling whatever, but must sigh inwardly when he hears that promise, and say, “May that rest be mine ; if I have rest unto my soul I have rest indeed, for then all is well for time and for eternity.” Let us look, then, to the Spirit of God, to draw us to seek in Jesus that heavenly rest if we have not found it, and to enjoy it more fully, and bless His name for the unspeakable gift, if we have some degree of it in our breasts.

The opportunity will only allow me to dwell upon *the completeness of the rest that Christ furnishes unto the souls of His people*.—We shall take up this one point, that we may dwell upon it more fully and explicitly.

The rest that every man needs is primarily an *intellectual* rest, a rest for his understanding. He must be a very unthinking man, indeed, who does not awake—at times at least—to the awful mysteries that encompass him, to the way in which he can come up, as it were, to the very thick curtain that screens these mysteries, and yet cannot penetrate them himself ; to his connexion with the Infinite God, and a dread immortality ; to his responsibility to that God with whom he has to do ; to the way in which he has to be dealt with in a future existence ; to the character, the attributes, the perfections of the unsearchable God ; to the way in which it may be possible for God to pardon while He punishes, to justify while He remains just : there are all these, and a thousand other inquiries past finding out ; yet, if a man has any reflection at all, he must have his mind restless, he

must be anxious to get to know these things. Ignorance is not happiness, it is restlessness and uncertainty. A man must come to some degree of satisfaction to his mind in these great inquiries, or the mind will be stupefied into indifference, or degraded into sensuality. A man only feels rest because he has no thought or reflection at all. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Yet, should not the creature wish to know his Creator; should not an immortal being wish to know about his immortality? His mind will be ill at ease, until he gets some calm solution of these great questions that press upon him. There are many careless people, who drag on their existence without much restlessness; but we see thousands of thinking and earnest men sorely perplexed, dashing their heads against the lamp they cannot penetrate, and seeking a light to give them rest where they cannot find it. The Saviour of sinners brings down to man a knowledge of God; He "hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel;" He brings the inquiring mind to a simple, clear, and satisfactory knowledge of "the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent;" He tells us what God is, whence He is, and where He is; He tells us of His glorious perfections and marvellous kingdom; He tells us of His perfect law; He tells us of the immortality to which we are going; He tells us of the judgment seat, before which we must stand; He tells us of the character of God, as a God of mercy, truth, and grace. "He that hath seen me," says Christ, "hath seen the Father;" and it is only in Christ that God is apprehended and comprehended, and the yearning intellect is satisfied. When God is known in Christ, so that the mind has the witness in itself that this is true, that it is no fable, or misrepresentation, or false conception of God, then God in Christ satisfies and soars above the loftiest understanding, or the highest conception man unaided can form of God; so that, of God incarnate, a little child may learn more than Socrates did with all his

philosophy, or Cicero with all his learning. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." Rest to the intellect is one of the sweet comforts that Jesus gives to them who come to Him, and receive Him with all meekness, and love, and simplicity. He calms their minds; and, as it is beautifully said in the benediction with which we close our public services, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," keeps the mind in the knowledge, as it keeps the heart in "the love of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

But it is not merely the intellect, it is still more the *heart* that finds rest in Christ. Man is not a thing of mere intellect; he has affections and desires, and earnest longings within—longings for peace and enjoyment. Many are seeking these restlessly, because they are seeking them where they are not to be found, and they are feeding upon ashes, and are deceiving themselves. Look at young people: are they at rest, are they at peace for the most part? And look at middle-aged men: are they at rest, are their minds composed and calm? Is not the picture of the world for the most part "a troubled sea that cannot rest?" See how many are yearning after what they cannot get; how many are breaking their hearts for that which, if they had, would only show them the impotence, the hollowness, and the delusion of that on which they have set their hearts. People may get on pretty comfortably when all is calm and bright, but when illness comes, and death looks them in the face, oh what a yearning sickness comes over the heart, and how a man finds that all his fancied security is gone! Does not the heart yearn after something higher and holier, and more enduring than earth can give? See how many men have broken their hearts because they could not find rest in what they set their hearts

upon ; how many have been yearning after affections not requited, led astray by their affections, eaten up, as it were, with a canker, and that because they have set their affections on things below—upon a poor, perishable, fallible, lying, dying thing, and not upon the unchangeable ; how many are bereft of those they loved best, and weep over the ashes of the dead with bootless sorrow, because their hearts have lost the object on which they were set, and they are led to say, “ I do well to be angry,” I do well to be sorry, and to go mourning down to the grave. It is a restless world, because it is a world of idolatry ; the heart is withdrawn from its proper affection, to waste away upon poor “broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” But Jesus gives the soul that which the soul requires—a blessed, infinite, imperishable, eternal object of love ; He comes to us with love on His lips, and love in His heart ; He comes to us offering us peace, telling us of love : telling us that “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up : That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life ;” He tells us, “The life we live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God, who gave himself for us.” Here is love, lasting as eternity : “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” And this love is assured ; there is no disappointment *there* ; there are no broken hearts *there*, save that heart broken by sin, but healed by Jesus’ precious blood. Jesus does not despise the humble tribute of the poor sinful heart. “Give me thine heart,” He says to every person who hears me ; and if that heart be freely given, He will “in no wise cast it out.” He gives us, not simply some little drops, but He deluges us with the ocean of His fulness ; for the height, and length, and depth, and breadth of the love of Christ passes knowledge.

Ah, weary, wandering, wildering young persons, who are

chasing after poor perishing objects—admiration, dress, fashion, folly, the love of some fellow-worm—you will never find rest there ; you are chasing after a shadow ; you are pursuing after a mere rainbow, that looks sparkling and bright, but it is but at best a phantom in the cloud ; and you go mourning and sorrowful and sad, because you lose the beloved objects of your life—because your idols are broken and your dreams are dissipated. Oh ! that you would give your hearts to Christ, and seek in His love the portion of your souls imperishable that cannot be taken away. “ I am persuaded that neither height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ”—“ Whom have I in heaven but Thee ? and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison with Thee.” Brethren, attain to that, and you have attained to the best rest for your souls.

The rest Christ gives unto the soul is not only rest to the intellect and rest to the heart, but it is pre-eminently rest to the *conscience*. If a man has not rest to his conscience, he will never have abiding contentment and comfort ; an evil conscience will more or less startle and torment him, and sooner or later will open upon him all its scorpion stings. It is said that that poor misguided man Holyoake once said, “ Let a man do his duty fully, and he will not be afraid of dying.” Yes, but when did a man ever do his duty fully ? where is the man who can, on the ground of duty, challenge acceptance of God ? For what has he done ? Has he served God with all his heart every year, every week, every conscious hour of his existence ? Where is the man who has done this ? And if he has not, can he stand before God upon the ground of his duty ? If he cannot, how is he to stand ? how is he to find peace for his conscience ? He cannot find it anywhere but in Christ. He is our peace, “ whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood —“ The blood

of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"—“That He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth.” Oh blessed gift of all! There is peace for the conscience. If Jesus could not give that, in vain would man answer questions of understanding and meet yearnings of heart, for all could not “purge the conscience from dead works;” but this is the very climax of his glorious errand; He came, “that we might have life,” and have it “more abundantly;” He cleanses us from all our iniquities, and brings us to God in reconciliation and peace. O brethren, here it is that the soul finds rest—rest in pardon, rest in righteousness, rest in a plenteous and full acquittal which comes sealed with the blood of Him who gave that rest; not by the setting aside of the law, but by satisfying the law; not by freeing a man from his duty, but by making duty his delight; not by stripping the Deity of His perfections, but by magnifying them; not by finding forgiveness in the breach of His law, but in the perfect and complete fulfilment of His law.

Then, brethren, finally and briefly, Christ gives to the souls of His people rest from *sin*.—If a man is rightly taught of God, he will not be satisfied with the views of Him, however grand, that do not tell upon his heart and mind; nor with the love of God towards him, however full it may be, if he is not undergoing a purification of his nature from the corruption and pollution of sin. The servant of God hates sin. He once loved it, and would still, but for Jesus. The child of God hates sin, and cannot find rest until he has some sense of that purifying process going on. To be the slave of corruption and led captive by the devil, the world, and the flesh, no man can be satisfied with who feels aright. And, brethren, no doubt, in this respect our rest is rather in assurance of faith and hope than in full fruition. A man has an earnest war to carry on; he has to do battle with sin and guilt; he has in his spiritual armour to “fight the good fight of faith;” he has to wrestle

against the world, the flesh, and the devil ; and herein is our rest, that we wrestle in confidence that we must be conquerors, and more than conquerors. A man who is sure when he enters the battle-field that, amid all the rage of battle, he must be the conqueror, will feel calm, because he will feel that his victory is certain. Was it not so with that blessed soldier of the cross, who cried out in the depths of his struggle, "O wretched man that I am ; who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." There was his assurance that he must, in Christ, overcome ; and, therefore, he had rest,—not in sin, but in Christ ; not in the consciousness that he would still have to fight, but in the assurance that He should be "more than conqueror, through Him that loved us, and gave Himself for us."

Look at *the fulness and the beauty of the rest that is in Christ*—Rest to the intellect, in its yearning inquiries and bootless researches ; rest to the heart, in its yearning affections, and self-consuming desires after some portion that it cannot find on earth ; rest too, oh, how blessed ! to the conscience freed from guilt, and at peace with Christ ; rest from sin, because fighting in peace, and assured of victory ; and therefore rest, in the confidence that we must come off conquerors in the struggle. "All things work together for good to them that love God."

Now, brethren, is there one amongst us who does not feel in his secret conscience, "that is indeed what I need ?" If you have not got it, why should you not have it ? Does not Christ come to give it ? does He not offer it ? Does He not pledge Himself that it shall be yours, if you seek it ? "Ye shall find rest unto your souls." If many find it not, it is because they have not sought it, or because they have not sought it aright, in Christ, "simply, with their whole hearts."

O brethren ! come to Him who says to you, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest. Do you not see that it is not our wanting it that makes Him give it, it is not that we ask it. He has wrought it, He has completed it, and He offers it "without money and without price." Then, brethren, further, let us remember, the time will not be long when we *must* come to the point. Surely we ought to have that rest before it is too late—before the dark, dark shadows of eternity are upon us. Should we not seek it steadily and constantly all our lives? should we not seek to be found in that rest, that we may not be alarmed or disturbed when sickness and death come, when we have to mourn over the death-beds of those we love, or stand at the grave-side of those we commit to the dust?

And, brethren, is there an opportunity when that rest is more assured to us, than that which invites us this morning, where, in one of the beautiful passages after confession and asking for pardon, it is said: "Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to Him, 'Come unto me, all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.'" May we find more and more that rest, as we take the pledges which assure it to us; a rest which is sealed with the blood of Him who gives it!

THE END.

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