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SUNSETS

ON

THE HEBREW MOUNTAINS.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.



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SUNSETS

ON

THE HEBREW MOUNTAINS.

BY THE

REV. J. R. MACDUFF, D. D.,

AUTHOR OF "MEMORIES OF GENNESARET," "MORNING AND NIGHT WATCHES,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

"'Tis gone that bright and orb'd blaze,
Fast fading from our wistful gaze;
Yon mantling cloud has hid from sight
The last faint pulse of quiv'ring light."

"There was a soul on eve autumnal sailing,
Beyond the earth's dark bars,
Toward the land of sunsets never paling,
Toward heaven's sea of stars;
Behind there was a wake of billows tossing,
Before, a glory lay.
O happy soul! with all sail set, just crossing
Into the Far-away—
The glooms and gleams—the calmness and the strife
Were death behind thee, and before thee life."

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IF the following pages contained a mere roll and record of death-bed scenes, they would form a gloomy volume.

Such, however, is not their purport. While the Author has occasionally dwelt (as in the two opening chapters) on the *closing hours* of Scripture worthies,—whenever incidents of note in connexion with these are recorded,—he has, in general, rather sought to make their “last days” the standpoint for a retrospective view of character and history. It has been his endeavour mainly to inculcate, not so much lessons from death, as lessons from life viewed from this its solemn termination. As an eloquent writer has remarked,—“Death is often at once the close and the epitome of existence. It is the index at the end of a volume. All a man’s properties seem to gather round him as he is about to leave the world.” There is often, moreover, a mellowed glory surrounding the hour of dissolution. God’s saints are like forest trees in their golden autumn tints—grandest in decay, when the hand of death is on them. They often hear, like Bunyan’s hero, distant bells from the land of Beulah. Minis-

tering angels seem to bring down draughts—prelibations—from the river of life, to refresh their spirits in the closing conflict.

Perhaps, to some, the name selected for the book may require explanation or apology. If we regard the world of nature as a typical volume, full of suggestive analogies,—an exponent and interpreter of the world of spirit,—no symbol surely is more striking and appropriate than “SUNSET” is of *Death*. Every evening, as the sun goes down, we have a permanent type and enduring parable of the close of life, as well as a pledge and prophecy of the rising again in the eternal morning. The God of nature, in this His own hieroglyphic, countersigns the beautiful utterance of His Word—“*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace,*” (Ps. xxxvii. 37.) In support of these assertions, reference might be made to the motto-verses from some of our best poets which head the following chapters. It will be seen that these masters of sacred song, in their delineations of the believer’s death, have fondly clung to the same impressive figure. They have dipped their pencils in the golden hues of a western sky.

Few can have beheld a gorgeous Sunset, without the same suggestive association. Incomparably the grandest scene the writer ever witnessed in nature, was a sunset on Mont Blanc, as seen from the Flegere. The “monarch mountain” had appeared during the day, under varied, shifting, capricious effects of light and shadow;—at one time fleecy vapours, at another, darker masses obscuring his giant form. As

evening, however, approached, all these were dispelled ;—not a cloud floated in the still summer air, when the glowing orb hastened to his setting. The vast irregular pyramid of snow became a mass of delicately-flushed crimson. Anon, the shadows of night crept up the valley, until nothing but the summit of the mountain retained the hectic glow of expiring life—a coronal of evanescent glory. This, too, in its turn, slowly and impressively passed away. The flaming sun of that long afternoon sank behind the opposite range of Alps ; and the colossal mass in front, which, a few minutes before, had been gleaming with ruby splendour, now lapsed into a hue of cold gray, as if it had assumed robes of sack-cloth and ashes, in exchange for the glow and warmth and brightness of life. The image and emblem could not be mistaken. Both fellow-spectators at the moment gave expression to the same irresistible suggestion,—What a sublime symbol—what an awful and impressive *photograph* of DEATH !

Nor was this all. When that last lurid glow was lingering on the summits, lighting up the jewels in this icy diadem, the sun itself had in reality already set ;—he had sunk behind the line of horizon. The valley beneath had long been sleeping in shadow, and lights were twinkling in the *châlets*. This, too, had its irresistible spiritual meaning and lesson, a lesson which is again and again noted and enforced in the succeeding pages,—that the radiance of the moral sunset lingers after the earthly course has run ;—*a man's influence survives death !* These glorious orbs of the

olden time have set for thousands of years, but their mellowed lustre still irradiates the world's mountain-tops. Though dead, they yet "speak."

There is no teaching so interesting or so profitable as that of inspired biography. There are no lessons so grand or so suggestive as those derived from the study of the lives and character of the great heroes of the past, who manfully struggled through trial and temptation till crowned with victory. They are truly the world's great "artists." They have moulded *life*. Wondrous as are the conceptions wrought out by the sculptor's chisel in breathing marble,—what, after all, are these? Dumb creations—soulless, inanimate expressions of beauty and power. Grandeur, and more godlike, surely, has been the work of those "great ones of the olden time" who, by their words and deeds, have influenced successive ages—chiselled the moral features of mankind.

It is the humble wish of the writer, to act as guide to his readers through these corridors of hoary time, rich in this noblest sculpture. Amid the hum of a busy industry; amid the race for riches; amid the wheels and shuttles of labour—at the counter—in the exchange—the house—the family,—let us learn from these great biographies how to live and how to die. Each character delineated in sacred story, if we read it aright, has some grand individual lesson to teach for this work-day world;—some principle, or spiritual grace we do well to ponder; whether it be faith, or fortitude, or patience, or self-reliance, or self-sacrifice, or submission, or endurance,

or scrupulous honour. In a few of the examples selected, we have beacons to warn; but in the main, they are designed to guide, stimulate, and instruct. Let us watch the life-struggle, and profit by its close. Let us see how these candidates for immortality ran their race and reached their goal, and let us "go and do likewise;"—saying, in the spirit of the great poet of nature, who employs again and again that same image of Life's "SUNSET,"—

" Help with Thy grace through life's short day
Our upward and our downward way,
And glorify for us the west,
When we shall sink to final rest." *

With one exception, for reasons stated in the chapter itself, the author has restricted the "Sunsets" to those on "*the Hebrew mountains*." Though thereby constrained to exclude several well-known Bible characters, it has enabled him alike to set needful limits to the volume, and also to include some names less known and familiar in the roll of Hebrew worthies. He will not venture to offer any apology for the imperfections of the volume, and the inadequate justice done to a great theme. Such as it is, he commends these "sunset" memories to the Great Head of the Church, with the earnest hope and prayer—

" That often from that other world on this
Some gleams from great souls gone before may shine,
To shed on struggling hearts a clearer bliss,
And clothe the truth with lustre more divine."

* Wordsworth.

Sunset on the Mountains of Mamre.

"These in Life's distant even,
 Shall shine serenely bright;
As in th' autumnal heaven
 Mild rainbow tints at night:
 When the last show'r is stealing down,
 And ere they sink to rest,
The sunbeams weave a parting crown
 For some sweet woodland nest.

"The promise of the morrow
 Is glorious on that eve;
Dear as the holy sorrow
 When good men cease to live.
 When, bright'ning ere it die away,
 Mounts up their altar-flame,
 Still tending with intenser ray
 To Heav'n, whence first it came.

"Say not it dies, that glory,
 'Tis caught unquench'd on high;
 Those saint-like brows so hoary
 Shall wear it in the sky.
No smile is like the smile of death
 When, all good musings past,
Rise wafted with the parting breath
 The sweetest thought the last."

—*Christian Year.*

"Then ABRAHAM gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre."—GEN. xxv. 8, 9.

SUNSET ON THE MOUNTAINS OF MAMRE

WE begin with the oldest, and in many respects the most memorable, of all the "sunsets" on the Hills of Canaan,—the departure of the illustrious Father of the Hebrew nation, whose name to the "children of ABRAHAM" is still their most treasured patrimony, the great household word in their world-wide home. There is little recorded in connexion with the mere closing of the Patriarch's life. Like the sunsets with which his eyes were familiar in his own Eastern sky,—we have no twilight hour—no melting shadows of eventide. Other death-beds in the olden time, as we shall find, were rendered remarkable by saintly counsels,—children and children's children were summoned in to receive the hallowed benediction and catch the last glimpse of the dimming eye! All this is a blank in the terminating chapter of Abraham's history. Whether Isaac had stood by his dying parent's pillow, listening to parting attestations to God's faithfulness, and in some new visions of the "far-off" Gospel "day" had poured into his ear words of prophetic rapture;—whether roving Ishmael had sped him from his desert "castles" * to receive and return the final blessing;—whether old Eliezer of Damascus was there, faithful in death as he had been in life, lifting up his withered hands in prayer to

* Gen. xxv. 16.

“the Lord God of his master Abraham,”—of all this, not a word is said;—not even is the locality described where that great orb of Israel hasted to his setting. We have every reason to believe it must have been nigh to Mamre. But whether in some sequestered spot, with only a few of his own family around him, or amid the suppressed hum of a “city of tents,” hushed in awe and silence under the shadow of death, we are not informed. The simple narrative tells us no more than that, at the ripe period of one hundred and seventy-five years, “*Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah.*”

Nor is this silence of the biographer and of the Spirit of God without its significance. Does it not announce the lesson, constantly recurring in the succeeding pages, that *life*, and not *death*, is the all-important part of human history? We test the strength of the vessel, not by the way in which she entered the sheltered harbour, but by how she wrestled with the storm out in the defenceless ocean. We estimate the prowess of the warrior, not as he returns at the close of conflict, weak and weary, but as he bore himself up amid the fray, in the heat of battle. It is the opening and middle chapters of a man’s biography that are the momentous ones, and which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, determine the character of the closing scene. It may, indeed, be soothing to the bereaved to listen at the hour of death to devout expressions of faith and hope;—these, in the case of all, are hallowed keepsakes and souvenirs to be exchanged for no earthly treasure. But rather, far rather, would we revert to the

even tenor of a close walk with God. If the death-bed be in silence and gloom,—if the spirit be hurried away to meet its Maker amid the ravings of delirium,—what signify a few gathering clouds at sunset? Better is the memory of meekness and gentleness, patience and submission, through a bright heavenly life. Better surely these, than the reverse,—a storm-wreathed life-sky—the sun of existence wading through clouds, and a watery burst of sunshine at the setting.

But brief as the record of Abraham's death is, it is not without its impressive lessons. Let us take clause by clause in the order of the inspired register.

“Then Abraham gave up the ghost.”

“The English word ghost,” says an able critic and commentator,* “is supposed to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *gast*, ‘an inmate—inhabitant—*guest*’—and also ‘spirit.’ In popular use it is now restricted to the latter meaning. But the primitive idea seems to be that of dismissing the soul or spirit as the guest of the body.” In this etymological sense the reference is peculiarly beautiful. Abraham's spirit—his immortal and nobler part—was “a guest,” a lodger or wayfarer in an earthly tent—a perishable dwelling. Its tent-life was not its home-life. It was like an imprisoned bird longing to soar away. And now the appointed time has come—the cage is opened—the winged tenant goes free. The tent is taken down, pin by pin—rope and stakes and canvas—and the “lodger for the night,” forsaking the blackened patch in the desert—the smouldering ashes of his bivouac-fire—speeds away to “the better country,”—

* See Bush on Genesis, p. 252.

“His spirit with a bound
Left its encumb'ring clay;
His tent at sunrise on the ground
A darken'd ruin lay.”*

Not long ago, a group of Alpine villagers were engaged, in early summer, weeding their crops close to their native hamlet. Above them rose mountain piled on mountain, crested with jagged peaks of everlasting snow. A low, murmuring, crushing sound was heard at eventide, high up among these cliffs; a sound too familiar to be mistaken by experienced ears. It was the awful messenger of wrath and destruction. A fragment of rock, loosened in the topmost crags, became the nucleus and feeder of the avalanche. Down came the terrific invader, sweeping all before it, and burying the handful of huts in a common ruin. The villagers themselves escaped unhurt. Disentangling their mutilated furniture from the midst of the broken pine-rafters and stones, and thankful for their providential escape, they moved to the opposite slope of the valley, and reared their dwellings anew.

Death is that avalanche! “At such a time as we think not!” It may be in smiling spring, or in radiant summer, or hoary winter—down it comes, destroying all that is fair and lovely and beauteous,—rooting up tender flowers, budding blossoms, trellised vines, primeval forests,—overwhelming “the house of the earthly tabernacle,” and leaving it a mass of dilapidated walls and shattered timbers. But what of the inmate? What of the immortal inhabitant? The house is dissolved, but the tenant is safe. A new home is reared for it. The soul quits the wrecked bodily frame-work,

* Montgomery.

and seeks the "building of God," "eternal in the heavens." The same idea is beautifully expressed by a Christian poet of the land of Luther in one of their funeral Hymns—

"Here in an inn a stranger dwelt,
Here joy and grief by turns he felt:
Poor dwelling, now we close thy door,
The task is o'er,
The sojourner returns no more!

"Now of a *lasting* Home possesst,
He goes to seek a deeper rest.
The Lord brought here; He calls away,
Make no delay,
This home was for a passing day."*

The golden-winged butterfly soars aloft from its broken chrysalis home. Death, like the angel in Peter's dungeon, breaks the fetters of mortality, throws open the prison doors; and from the gloom of night, and the crash of the earthquake, leads the spirit out to gladsome day. Oh that we would ever view it as such—the exodus of life—the outmarching of the soul from its chains and its bondage to the land of rest and liberty and peace!

"*He died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years.*" We must be struck with the tautology here. First the Patriarch's age is given in the previous verse—"And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life, which he lived, an hundred three score and fifteen years," (ver. 7.) Then it is added that he died—"in old age"—"a good old age"—"an old man"—"and full of years."

The reason of this redundancy of expression would have been better understood and appreciated by a Jew than by us.

* Sachse.

The Old Testament economy dealt largely in temporal blessings. These were bestowed as types and shadows and pledges of higher spiritual ones. Old age was one of these. "Wisdom" is represented in the Book of Proverbs with "*length of days in her right hand.*" And the Psalmist, in enumerating the blessings heaped on the head of the righteous, says—"*The Righteous shall flourish like the Palm-tree; he shall grow like the Cedar in Lebanon. . . .*"* THEY SHALL STILL BRING FORTH FRUIT IN OLD AGE."* "*The hoary head is a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness.*"†

In the case of Abraham, his advanced years were perhaps the more specially noted by his biographer as a testimony to God's fidelity to His promises. Eighty years antecedent to this time, in the earlier life of the patriarch, the Lord had led His servant forth amid the glories of an Eastern night, and pointed to the spangled firmament as an emblem of his spiritual seed. In the solemn covenant which He made with him on that remarkable occasion, He included this among other promises, "*And thou shalt go to thy Fathers in peace, thou shalt be buried IN A GOOD OLD AGE!*"‡ Jehovah had been with him in life. He had been repeatedly true to His assurance, "*Fear not, Abraham, I am thy SHIELD, and thy exceeding great reward!*"§ And now "with *long life*" did He "satisfy him" before He fully shewed him the promised "salvation!"

But this good old age—this fulness of years—this protracted life had its close. The sun lingered at his setting—

* Ps. xcii. 12-14.

‡ Gen. xv. 15.

† Prov. xvi. 31.

§ Gen. xv. 1.

but he set at last! Abraham was "the friend of God," yet he died. He was the "Father of the Faithful," yet he died. All his greatness and goodness, and faith and patriarchal virtues, could not exempt him from the universal doom. "Though he lived long and lived well, though he did good and could be ill spared, yet he died at last."* His first inheritance in Canaan was a grave for his dead. God had assured him that all the land his footsteps trod would yet be his own; but for many a year the Pilgrim Wanderer could only point to one little spot, and say, "*That is mine.*" It was the field and the sepulchre he purchased of Ephron the Hittite, by the walls of Hebron, where he laid the body of Sarah, and where his own was next to follow. "*I am a stranger and a sojourner,*" said he, as his eye fell for the first time on that grave. Let us seek to cherish the old Pilgrim's spirit. We may have no other rood of ground in the world which we can call our own—but we shall one day claim the narrow house "appointed for all living!" With our eye upon it, let us, with the great patriarch, confess that we are "*strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*"

"*He was gathered to his people.*" It is a pleasing and a hallowed thought,—the dust of a household mixing together! The most sacred spot on earth is the place where the ashes of our kindred repose. And beautiful is the exception which one occasionally sees made in our own land, when, by reason of family misfortune and disaster or other causes, the old family property and inheritance has passed into other and

* Matthew Henry.

alien hands,—there is yet *one* spot which has been still preserved—where the yew tree and weeping willow every now and then have their stillness invaded by the tramp of the funeral throng!

Abraham had doubtless the same feeling. We know not where he died,—but we are here expressly told that the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the Hittite, was opened to receive his mortal tenement. But is it this to which the historian alludes when he records of this illustrious saint that he was “*gathered to his people?*” Abraham’s own people (his fathers) were not in Canaan but in Charran, and it is evidently *not* to them he refers, in the sense of being interred in their distant sepulchres, for the next verse informs us that this was not the case. Alike of Moses and Aaron it is said, in recording their death, “*They were gathered to their people.*” But this plainly could refer to no vault where rested the ashes of their sires, for the loneliest of sepulchres was appointed them, amid the solitudes of Hur and Mount Nebo.

Without grounding too positively on an ambiguous phrase the statement of a great and comforting truth, which has other passages in its support, may we not, in common with many trustworthy interpreters, ancient and modern, venture with strong probability to conclude, that by the expression in question, the sacred writer meant, not that the patriarch’s body, but that his soul was gathered to swell the ranks of that true “*people*” in the Church triumphant, with whom his name is so often associated in Holy Writ. His ashes were laid in the cave of Machpelah—(we come to a description of their obsequies immediately)—but the biographer first describes

the destiny of the nobler part. He speaks of Abraham as "giving up the ghost," (dismissing the spirit-guest from the earthly tabernacle,) then he follows that spirit in its arrowy flight, till he sees it folding its wings amid the ranks of "the people of God" in the Church of the glorified.

It affords a delightful theme for hallowed imagination, to picture the soul of this great and good man entering the gates of glory, to be welcomed by the Abels, and Noahs, and Enochs, and the unrecorded saints in the ranks of the redeemed, the pledge and first-fruits of a mighty "*multitude which no man can number.*"

Moreover, we are left to infer that his was an *immediate* entrance on a glorified state. That the moment he breathed away his spirit, it took its place in the mansions of bliss. When, three hundred and thirty years subsequently, God appeared to Moses out of the burning bush at Horeb, He revealed Himself as "*the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.*" Our blessed Lord's own comment on which, in reply to the Sadducee objection to a resurrection, is, that Abraham was then alive—for *God was "not the God of the dead, but of the living."** And in His parable of "the Rich Man and Lazarus," He represents the glorified beggar as reclining on "*the bosom of Abraham.*" †

This informs us that "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory." They are a living people! Oh, most precious and consoling truth to those who have nameless treasures in the tomb! Years after they have gone to their "long home;" when perhaps the moss may have gathered on their grave-

* Matt. xxii. 32.

† Luke xvi. 23.

stones, and time has dismantled their old earthly dwelling, God appears to the lonely survivor and says—"Fear not! I am the God of thy sainted one!—Fear not! I am his shield and his exceeding great reward." It gives us also the ennobling and encouraging assurance that when we die, if we die in the Lord, we go not to a strange or unfamiliar land;—that yonder heaven is a second home. "Our people" (our loved and lost) are gathered there before us. Fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, parents and children, are waiting to welcome us, and to renew the old groups and greetings of hallowed earthly communion. When David said regarding the tender blossom that lay withered at his feet, "*I shall go to him,*" can we suppose that the eye of that stricken parent rested only on the cold walls of the mausoleum where the cherished dust was to repose? No; his thoughts were dwelling on reunion in a better world, where affection's "silver cord" would no more be loosed, nor its "golden bowl" be broken.

Cheerless indeed would be the thought, as we lay beloved relatives in the grave, "I shall see you no more for ever!" We cling to the belief that there shall be renewed friendships, undying restoration of earth's sweetest fellowships. How comforting especially must this expectation be to those who like Abraham are "full of years"—the last of their generation,—the friends of their early life removed,—the village, or street, or city where they were born, filled with new and unrecognised faces—the lights in their own homestead one by one extinguished—the trees of the home forest, one by one, cut down, and the gnarled trunks alone remaining! How cheering for them to think, when stretched on a death-bed, that they

are not so much going *from* home as *to* home ;—that if they wish to be “gathered to their people,” they must go to heaven! That that “dark Valley” from which they used, in the bright buoyant days of youth, to start, as something fearful, is really the avenue leading up to their Father’s dwelling-place,—the rendezvous of their kindred. As they draw near, they hear music and joy ; and many a familiar voice exclaiming—“This my parent, my brother, my son, was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found !”

There is just one other entry in this register of Abraham’s death—“*And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah.*”

We read of no great funeral procession !—no trappings or pageantry of mock-mourning, such as mar in modern times the solemnity of death. There are only *two* mourners mentioned. More there may have been. As we read of Samuel that “*all Israel*” mourned him, so the thousands in the strange land who had come to recognise Abraham as a mighty prince* may have gathered in as mute spectators of the solemn scene. If they did, nothing is said of it. For aught we know the old servant of God may have uttered a wish, oft expressed still,—that no pomp, or equipage, or crowd should throng the way to the field at Mamre. The sacred text pictures to us a grave, with only *two* attendants, paying the last tribute of filial devotedness to the most honoured of parents! And who were these? Other sons had Abraham. But the heir and the outcast, the child of the *bondwoman* and the child of the *free*, are alone there the

* Gen. xxiii. 6.

representatives of his family. See them smoothing his death-pillow, composing his limbs, embalming his body, and committing it to its last resting-place!

Beautiful and touching spectacle! Ah, Death! how often hast thou proved the healer of breaches? We know that a bitter hostility had separated the brothers; Hagar's son had never forgotten the hour of dishonour when he and his mother were thrust out by a jealous rival. Who can tell but the old father, ere he closed his eyes in death, got the estranged children to lock their hands together in forgiveness? Be this as it may, we see them at all events in hallowed brotherhood, standing by the grave of the patriarch,—Isaac with his meditative spirit, his soul full of burning memories of parental fondness,—Ishmael, “the wild man” of the desert, leaning on his reversed spear,—and both, on this sacred altar of their common affections, rekindling the smouldering embers of brotherly love. A pregnant lesson to divided relatives—divided families—divided churches—divided nations!

“He being dead yet speaketh!” Is Abraham dead? His body sleeps, we believe to this day undisturbed, in the old cave of Machpelah, guarded by a cumbrous pile of masonry. But the death-wail, which arose from the mouth of that grotto at Mamre, did not close the earthly record of this spiritual giant. His example and influence have been living through a hundred generations. His faith has been spoken of throughout the whole world. The lamp which he lit on leaving Charran, unquenched by the damp and darkness of the tomb, still burns bright and clear. The winds which shook the boughs, and at last laid prone on the ground this

old Terebinth of Mamre, have blown its seeds into earth's thousand sequestered nooks and crevices. The sanctity of his great character never dies. How many a Jewish, ay, and Christian father—as with bereft and desolate heart he mourns over family losses—has had his misgivings and murmurings silenced and reprov'd as he thinks of that unparalleled surrender of the child of promise;—God exclaiming, “Abraham! Abraham!”—the foreboding of heavy tidings,—whilst the Patriarch with alacrity responded—“*Here am I.*”

Let it be with us, in some imperfect degree, as with this holy saint. Let us seek to leave behind us some hallowed influence. He left behind him much that the world would call great—much cattle, substance, herds, flocks; a great name—a patriarch, a shepherd-king. But these were nothing compared with what outpeered them all—the testimony that he was “*the Friend of God.*”*

In this sense, may many of us be the children of Abraham; ambitious to bequeath as he did, not a legacy of money, or wealth, or honours, shekels of silver, herds of camels, or changes of raiment,—but a legacy of holy living and happy dying—lives of sterling integrity and worth.

Who among us (I believe not one) but can summon up, amid the graves of our fathers and deceased relatives, some such sacred character,—some hoary patriarch, some Abraham or Sarah,—whose exalted and consistent walk has left on our minds impressions never to be effaced; who, when we think of true Christians, (Israelites indeed,) start up before

* Hebron is still called El Khalyl, *i.e.*, “The Friend” from its having been the abode of the Patriarch.

us in vivid reality! They thought they bade us farewell when we were summoned to their death-chambers to receive a last blessing. Nay, deathless ones! ye are, indeed, "gathered to your people," but in many an hour—in the murmur of the dense crowd, in the hush of unbroken solitude—your silvery voices are still heard. Ye are "gathered to your people," but the people ye left behind you on earth still gather in thought around *you*. The flame has left for heaven, but the live-ashes still linger on the altar. The voice has ceased, but it reverberates in endless echoes among the earthly hills!

Nor let any suppose a *long* life like that of Abraham is required to fulfil the great purposes of existence. The expression in the sacred record is significant and suggestive, "an old man, and *full*." The words "*full of years*," are added by our translators, and are not in the original. "*Full*,"—the idea is that of a tree, whatever its age and dimensions, whose branches, great or small, are filled with sap and clothed with verdure. This fulness is not to be measured or estimated by time or years. It is the fulness of character; ripeness for transplantation to the heavenly Paradise. The young sapling if covered with foliage is fulfilling the conditions and purposes of life, as much as the oldest denizen of the forest. Of the loving child or youth who has consecrated an early existence to God, and who leaves the memories of worth and goodness behind him, as well as of the hoary-headed saint with his mantle of snowy age, it may be said, "He died an hundred years old."*

Let us seek especially, as we take the last look of Abra-

* Isa. lxxv. 20.

ham's mausoleum, to be partakers of his FAITH. It was this exalted and exalting grace which made him the hero that he was. "*Faithful Abraham*" is the panegyric which, more than once, inspired lips pronounce over his ashes. *Faith* was the motive principle, the guiding star throughout his chequered history. It was FAITH,—simple, calm, dignified trust in the bidding of God,—which led him from his paternal plains to the wild glens of distant Canaan. It was *faith* which reared altar upon altar wherever his tent was pitched. It was *faith* which girded on his armour against the confederate kings, and crowned him with victory. It was *faith* which dictated the unselfish proposals to Lot, in the partition of the land. *Faith* sent him to wrestle for the doomed cities of the plain. *Faith* enabled him to master the struggling emotions in his heart of hearts, in the hour when that grace culminated in its grandest triumph on the Mount of Sacrifice. Except in one solitary instance, his *Faith* ever forbade any mercenary calculations,—any debate between duty and expediency—between natural affection and divine obedience. He had but one thought, and that was to obey his God,—making his own will coincident with the Divine. He lived for this. It was enshrined in his soul, and sanctified and interpenetrated his whole being. GOD was to him food and raiment, home and country, Father and Friend—ALL! Abraham offers perhaps the grandest illustration earth has ever beheld of the great characteristic of the heavenly state, where the angelic will is finally and completely merged and absorbed in the Divine.

And the Great Being he so trustfully served, suffered not his faith to go unrecompensed. Never does the patriarch

rear his altar, but the sacrifice is acknowledged by the promise of some new blessings. Never does he gird himself for some fresh heroic deed, but some inspiring vision or "word" is ready to meet him. If his own character was one magnificent example of faith, obedience, self-surrender, and self-sacrifice, God in various ways, in the course of his history, repeats the touching and impressive picture of the King of Salem,—coming forth to meet His servant with tokens of royal favour as "the King of Righteousness" and "peace." His life is like a mighty pyramid rising to heaven. Every stone of trustful obedience which Abraham lays, God cements with some new covenant token. That enduring pyramid of FAITH still towers above his ashes, testifying alike to the moral greatness of the patriarch and to the faithfulness of Him "that promised."

Reader! have *you* this faith of Abraham—a faith which, as in his case, manifests its legitimate and invariable influence in "working by love," "purifying the heart," and "overcoming the world?" When you come to die, in what sense could it be said of you, "He is gathered to his people?" for *this* (in a widely different sense) will be said of *all*. "Say ye to the righteous," Ye shall be gathered to *your* people! "Say ye to the wicked," Ye shall be gathered to *yours*! The angels, who are to be the final ingatherers, are said to "bind" the righteous and wicked in separate "*bundles*." * "The unjust" shall be gathered among the unjust bundles, to be "unjust still." "The filthy" shall be gathered among the filthy, to be "filthy still." The righteous shall be gathered among the righteous, to be "righteous still;" and the holy

* Blunt's Lectures.

among the holy, to be "holy still." There will be moral assimilations. *Like* will draw to *like*. Spirits will cling to kindred spirits, like steel-filings to the magnet; or, as if the planets of heaven were suddenly to have the present equilibrium and balance of the great law of forces destroyed, so that many would rush to the central sun, and others shoot away into the illimitable abyss of darkness. There is a common saying on earth, "The child is the father of the man." Equally true is it, in a vaster sense, of the great future, that the mortal life is the parent of the immortal. What we *are*, will determine what we *shall be*. The moral and spiritual affinities of earth will decide those of eternity.

Let each ask, to which would I be gathered? What would be my bundle? If the ingathering angel of death were to put in his sickle to-night, which would be the sheaf into which the reaper's hand would cast me? The children of God, or the children of the wicked one? Can I now, looking up to Abraham "afar off" in the true Heavenly Canaan, say in the words of Ruth to Naomi, "*Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God?*"

And if we would add a closing sentence, it is this, Let us seek that the same lustrous, animating truth be ours which doubtless irradiated the countenance of the Patriarch at death, as it gladdened him in life.—"*Your Father Abraham,*" says Jesus, "*saw MY DAY afar off, and was glad!*"* It was the Vision of Christ—as the EL-SHADDAI, the "*All-Sufficient,*" which surrounded with a heavenly halo the pathway of this Pilgrim-father, and, as "he stood before his dead," gilded the sepulchre of Mamre with hopes full of im-

* John viii. 56.

mortality. Who knows but that the ecstatic vision may have brightened and increased in intensity amid the deepening shadows of age, till it became brightest of all at the close—the glory of this “full orb’s” setting, derived from the reflected splendour of the Sun of Righteousness? “*None but Christ*”—“*None but Christ*,” has ever been the motto and watchword of departing believers in every age of the Church. Is it not interesting to think of the key-note of this dying song of triumph as having been struck by the Father of the Faithful himself: to stand by that entranced pillow, and behold a panorama crowded with Gospel scenes passing before his eye; Bethlehem and Nazareth—Capernaum and Bethany—Gethsemane and Calvary; and more than all, the Divine PERSON who has given these names all their imperishable significance and glory? Other luminaries were to intervene before His day—all “the goodly fellowship of prophets”—but these lesser orbs pale before the brightness of “the Light of Lights.” They had “no glory by reason of the glory which excelleth.” Champion of Faith as Abraham was, he had, like others, his hours of weakness—misgiving, distrust, unbelief. Bright as was the setting of this patriarchal sun, we can descry spots in his descending disk. Morning and mid-day clouds obscured its radiance. And, therefore, like all the good and true who have preceded and followed him, he sought to have these, lost and swallowed up in the blaze of that “better Sun” whose rising was hailed with such triumphant joy.

Reader, would you die happy? Would you have yours also a peaceful “sunset?” Bring this “day of Christ” continually before you. Gather up, if we might so speak, the

rays of the Sun of Righteousness in store for the hour of your departure. Blessed, thrice blessed are those on whom in life He rises, and at death He sets with healing “in His beams.” Thrice blessed those who, at that hour, when their earthly warfare,—their spiritual conflict is closing, are met by the true Melchisedek to receive His benediction.

Abraham was the Friend of God; and He whose person and work made the patriarch “glad,” says, to each of His true disciples, “*I have called you Friends!*” Magnificent patrimony! better than earth’s best hereditary honours,—“the child of Abraham,” “the Friend of Jesus!” Believers; rise to the consciousness of your exalted rank, as the true aristocracy of the world, with the blood of patriarchs in your veins: allied to “the Prince of the kings of the earth,” “sons of God;”—ay, and along with nobler honours and destinies in *reversion*, permitted to “*sit down with ABRAHAM . . . in the kingdom of YOUR FATHER.*”

II.

A Distant Sunset.

“’Tis twilight now ;
The sovereign sun behind his western hills
In glory hath declined. The mighty clouds,
Kiss’d by his warm effulgence, hang around
In all their congregated hues of pride,
Like pillars of some tabernacle grand,
Worthy his glowing presence ; while the sky
Illumined to its centre, glows intense,
Changing its sapphire majesty to gold.”

—D. McCR.

“Nor shall dull age, as worldlings say,
The heavenward flame annoy ;
The Saviour cannot pass away,—
And with Him lives our joy.

“Ever the richest, tenderest glow
Sets round th’ autumnal sun :
But there sight fails ; no heart may know
The bliss when life is done.”

—KEBLE.

“By faith JACOB, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph ;
and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”—Hebrews xi. 21.

Genesis xlvii. 27-31 ; xlviii ; xlix. 18, 28-33.

A DISTANT SUNSET.

JACOB is the only name in our roll of ancient worthies whose departure was not strictly "a sunset on the Hebrew mountains." His sun set behind the pyramids of old Egypt, far from the land of his birth and his pilgrimage. But we cannot dissociate "*Israel*" from the hills and valleys which bear his name. In truth, no death-bed was in reality more in the heart of Canaan than his. The Hebrew mountains alone rose before his dying eye. We forget, as we listen to his lengthened farewell counsels, that so many leagues separate him from the land of his early life and wanderings; and are only reminded that he is at a distance from his home, by the preparations made for his obsequies by the house of Pharaoh, and by the vast funeral procession, as it winds along the highway from Egypt to Canaan.

No closing chapter in the annals of the patriarchs is so full of circumstantial detail. It was a quiet eventide after a stormy and troubled day. Moreover, it must be a scene peculiarly replete with animating and elevating lessons, when the great Apostle, out of the crowded incidents of Jacob's history, selects from the article of "*death*" the greatest and grandest illustration of his faith. Let us stand by his bedside, and receive instruction alike for the hour of life and the season of death.

1st, Let us note his " *blessing both the sons of Joseph.*"

Joseph, on hearing that his father was laid on his death-

bed, and that his last moments were approaching, hastened to conclude a life of filial devotedness by being present at the solemn scene. He took along with him his two boys, Manasseh and Ephraim, that they might profit by the old man's dying words, and receive his blessing. On their entering the apartment, the half-blind patriarch raised himself on his bed, and a supernatural strength seemed to be imparted to him.*

We have heard of "second sight" at death; and, indeed, in the case of God's people, as we have already noted in a previous page, who can gainsay that there seems often and again to be a strange brightening and quickening of the inner sense as the outer man perishes, as if light from "the excellent glory" were let in through the rent and rending walls of the cottage of clay? Who, that have been privileged to stand often by Christian death-beds, have not occasionally observed a vast and marvellous expansion of the spiritual vision; as if, though the breath still lingered, and the faltering tongue still spake, in reality, the mortal fetters had snapped, and the spirit had already begun its upward soaring? We have known of more than one ecstatic departure where there were either visions of the Saviour or of angels;—the death-couch lighted up with a mystic glory;—the imagery of Revelation actually realised,—the golden-

* What grandeur and vivacity of genius must Jacob retain even in that hour when strength and power fail, to be able to convey his ideas in such august terms, and in a flow of such happy poetic imagery as he does in the 49th chapter of Genesis! Who that reads this chapter would imagine that elevated strains like these—strains that would have done honour to the Muse of Homer, warbled from the lips of a dying man; . . . of a man, too, labouring under the utmost decays of age, and over whose head no fewer than one hundred and forty-seven years had passed?"—TOPLADY.

paved streets—the sapphire throne—the harpers harping with their harps, and voices saying, “*Come up hither!*” The sea of life over;—the voyager seems to descry the lights, and listen to the murmurs of the angel-crowd lining the celestial shore. The fragrance of the spicy groves seems wafted to the enraptured senses ere gardens of immortality are themselves in sight. The gate of Heaven seems ajar, and its music reaches the soul, as it waits under the portal ready to enter in! There was more than this in the case of Jacob. The spirit of prophecy had evidently descended. Glorious visions of the future rose up before him, until his eye rested on the very Angel that blessed him at Jabbok—the Redeemer of the world—the coming “Shiloh” of a future day! Filled with that glowing perspective of spiritual blessings, he calls the sons of Joseph to his side. He formally adopts them as his own. “*They are MINE,*” says he; “*as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be MINE.*” And again he says, “*Let my NAME be named on them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac;*” * “*and Joseph brought them near to him, and he kissed them, and embraced them.*” †

But let us pause and ask, Who is the giver, and who are the recipients of these blessings? As it has been well observed, if we had not already known how the patriarch and the youths stood relatively to one another, we would have concluded, from the way in which Jacob bestows his dying benediction, that he was some aged Sheik or shepherd-king taking two of the sons of his herdsmen and adopting them,—serving them heirs to his wealth and fortune. Who

* Gen. xlviii. 16.

† Gen. xlviii. 10.

would ever dream that the picture is really the reverse ; that it is a poor old man—himself a pensioner, and dependent on foreign bounty—bringing in the sons of a prince, and telling them with a dignified mien and bearing, that they are to be adopted as the heirs and children of a wandering shepherd ; that they are to renounce the certain honours of Egypt, the land of fertility and wealth, of wisdom and renown, and to barter all, for the possessions of two tribes in a hilly country—itsself far distant, and much of it yet to be conquered ?

What is the explanation of this remarkable transaction ? As in the case of Abraham, *Faith*—a lofty faith, solves it all. When Joseph and his two sons entered the dying-chamber, and when Israel strengthened himself and sat upon his bed, what were the old man's opening words ? “ *God Almighty appeared to me at Luz (or Bethel) in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people ; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession !* ” * And again, “ *He blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads !* ” † He transfers to these his two grandchildren the blessing which he himself received on that ever-memorable night at Bethel when he awoke from his ladder-dream : a blessing which, among other things, included the noblest of all—that “ *in him and his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed.* ”

* Gen. xlviii. 3, 4.

† Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

Had temporal blessings been what the patriarch sought to confer on these children—had it been a mere splendid provision for their earthly good—how different would have been his dying words, how different his parting advice to Joseph—“Never leave Egypt!” he would rather have said,—“Good fortune has raised you to the pinnacle of earthly prosperity. I am justly proud of your elevation. Bring up your sons as princes of the land. To ingratiate them with the people, let them serve the gods of Egypt. Blot out from their memories all trace of the poverty-stricken country of their fathers. Do all you can to found a mighty dynasty; and, now that I am about to die, rear a magnificent mausoleum or obelisk over my ashes: leave those of my fathers to rest alone in distant Machpelah.”

How different was his conduct! “Bring,” he says to princely Joseph—“Bring near thy two sons that I may bless them with my blessing and name upon them my name. Riches I have none to offer. But the blessing I crave for them, and which I seek to bestow, is mightier than Egyptian treasure, and more enduring than your pyramids.” “*The God of thy father,*” said he, turning to Joseph, “*shall help thee, and the Almighty shall bless thee; blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breast and of the womb: the blessings of thy Father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.*” *

Seventeen years in that strange land—seventeen years, too, of great prosperity in fertile Goshen, undoubtedly the least clouded period of Jacob’s life—had neither obliterated the

* Gen. xlix. 25, 26.

memories of Canaan, nor lessened his estimate of the superiority of spiritual blessings to the pomp and glitter of earthly renown. One smile from the God of Abraham was to him better than all the riches and honours of Egypt. His son being the Prime Minister of Pharaoh was nothing to the honour of being the child and the friend of God! And to give the best evidence of his sincerity, the dying patriarch, with a singular frequency, charges Joseph on no account to permit his remains to be buried in Egypt, but to carry them up to the land of Canaan. When he first feels himself dying, he sends for his son, and takes an oath of him on the subject: "*Put, I pray thee, thine hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me: bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.*" * And then, after finishing his family blessings, ere the curtain finally falls, he renews and reiterates the request, † getting at the same time the children pledged to fulfil and ratify their father's oath. Joseph, too, with a faith and magnanimity as noble as his dying parent's, joyfully acquiesces at once in receiving the blessing for his sons, and in swearing faithfully that he would obey his father's wishes regarding his funeral obsequies. Amidst all the grandeur of earthly empire, he too had learned the superiority of spiritual to temporal good, and knew in what true greatness consisted. "*His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.*" ‡ And this was what he coveted for his children. Many might call him fool and madman for casting away from him these golden prizes. He cared not. He loved their souls more than their earthly magnificence. He

* Gen. xlvii. 29.

† Gen. xlix. 29.

‡ Gen. xlix. 24.

would rather have God's blessing and poor Canaan, than rich Egypt without it.

What a lesson for us! Are we equally willing to barter temporal for spiritual good? Are we equally willing to cast aside the costly prize for our families, when we see that the acceptance of it would endanger their spiritual interests? In forming connexions in life—friendship connexions, marriage connexions, business connexions, trade connexions,—can we read this touching story of sons, father, and grandfather, and say with a good conscience, “We have done likewise?” that we have had respect—not to the gilded bauble, the high position, the dazzling honour, the brilliant earthly prospects—but that we have “had respect to the spiritual recompence of the reward?” Are our fondest and most earnest prayers that our children be the children of the living God?—that though they have little of this world's goods, they may be heirs of the incorruptible inheritance? And when we come to die, what a lesson from the death-bed of Jacob, to have the one absorbing thought for ourselves and those near and dear to us, that we meet in the true Canaan! *His* thoughts were wandering on the sunny pastoral hills and valleys of the covenant-land. Would this be our farewell prayer and longing,—“I die! but I am only a pilgrim here: Canaan is my home.” I desire “*a better country, that is, an heavenly.*” *

But there are two other incidents mentioned in connexion with the blessing of the sons of Joseph to which we must advert.

* Heb. xi. 16.

The first is, the giving the precedence in the blessing, not to *Manasseh*, but to his younger brother *Ephraim*.

We read in the narrative, that Joseph took them both to the bedside of the sightless patriarch, "*Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was first-born.*"* Joseph remonstrated. He imagined it was the mistake of his father's blindness, and was rectifying it by transferring the hands so as to retain the right of primogeniture to Manasseh. But his father refused, saying, "*I know it, my son, I know it,*" adding that, though Manasseh should be great, the younger son should be greater far, and his seed become "*a multitude of nations.*"

What was this but the foreshadow of a great truth,—the Gentile displacing and superseding the Jew. And surely it was only a further exemplification of Faith (implicit obedience to God's will and word) that Jacob persisted in his determination to bestow the chief blessing on the younger. His mind had just been wandering on the land of covenant promise, and the spiritual blessings God had in store for his seed. Would it be easy for him, on natural grounds, to make the averment, or rather in his dying scene to give the significant sign that there was a time coming when these exclusive privileges of his children were to cease; when his heirs and descendants (the Theocratic people) were themselves to be re-

* Gen. xlviii. 13, 14.

jected—their land and glory wrested from them—the entail of spiritual privileges broken and given to others? Add to this, must it not have cost him an effort thus to negative and thwart the wishes of so dutiful a son as Joseph, who was earnest that Manasseh should retain the right of the first-born? But he was divinely instructed otherwise; and he acted on the future apostolic maxim, “*I must obey God rather than men.*” We read, “*He guided his hands wittingly.*”* He acted according to “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”—The natural olive was to be cast out, and the wild olive grafted in. The fall of his own descendants was “to be the riches of the world;” and this, (as God’s will,) he boldly declares by the most expressive of symbolic actions. Oh, little did Egypt (where his dying-chamber was) know all that was signified for her in that closing transaction—the transference of the old man’s hands from the head of Manasseh to that of Ephraim! It was a promise that is yet to be fully realised in the case of this “basest of kingdoms,” when, as part of the Gentile world, she shall listen to the glad tidings, and Egypt shall be “*a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people . . . and Israel mine inheritance.*” †

One other topic still remains in connexion with the blessing of Joseph’s children. It is the naming of God under a twofold character. “*God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from*

* Gen. xlviii. 14.

† Isa. xix. 24, 25.

*all evil, bless the lads.** “God,”—“the God that FED me;”—“the Angel,”—“the God-angel that REDEEMED me.”

He leaves the world exulting in Jehovah,—first, as a God of PROVIDENCE. “*The God who fed me all my life long unto this day.*”

He seems to delight to dwell on God’s watchful care of him during the dark and troubled and chequered morning of his life. He loved to trace His hand amid all the vicissitudes of his eventful pilgrimage. May it not be to this fond memory of God, as a God of PROVIDENCE, that the apostle makes special reference, when he speaks of the dying man as “*leaning on the top of his staff?*” What was that staff? It had been his constant companion;—the pilgrim prop which he had carried with him and treasured, ever since the dark and gloomy night he sped him a fugitive from his father’s house! He makes special mention of his “staff” on returning from his long sojourn in Mesopotamia. “*With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.*” † He clung to his staff as the memento and memorial of many loving-kindnesses of Jehovah. He had flung it at his side on the night of the dream. It would be the first thing he grasped when he awoke in the morning, and said, “*How dreadful is this place!*” It was the same staff he had used, when he went forth a halting cripple from Peniel, when “the sinew shrank in the hollow of his thigh.” Doubtless it was the same staff he had leant on, when he was bowed with grief at his successive trials;—when “Joseph was not, and Simeon was not,” and they threatened to “take Benjamin also;” and it had formed the prop of his

* Gen. xlix. 15, 16.

† Gen. xxxii.

tottering steps when he had come up to Egypt to see Joseph before he died. It was the *souvenir* alike of prosperity and adversity. If that shepherd's crook had been able to speak, it could have told many a tale of Providential kindness and faithfulness. And now, when, for the last time, he calls to mind "the God who fed him all his life long," we see the aged patriarch strengthening himself on his bed, yet still "leaning on the top of his staff." It would be in patriarchal days what an underlined Bible or diary would be to a dying man in modern times:—a glance at it would aid memory in recalling unnumbered instances of love and kindness.

But the Apostle says more. Not only does he mention the "leaning on the staff," but he mentions also that "*he worshipped.*"

Whom *did* he worship? Whom *could* he worship, but the Being of whom he speaks? And who is this? Let his own words tell us:—"God—the ANGEL—who redeemed me." Oh, beautiful close to the life of Jacob! He leans on the staff of Providence, but he worships and adores the grace of a Redeeming Saviour! Christ is the last vision that floats before his dimming eye. He sees the cross of Calvary. He speaks of "Redemption." He exults in One who had paid a costly price—who had "*redeemed*" him from all iniquity. He had wrestled once with that Angel at Jabbok, and now he beholds, in distant futurity, that Angel wrestling for *him!* What, then, is this, but Christ preached at Jacob's death-bed,—Christ the last word on his lips? Like his father Abraham, "he sees the day of Christ afar off, and is glad;"—the music of that name, in *his* case also, refreshing his soul in death.

Come, let us stand by that pillow and learn the secret of a

triumphant departure. See the old man, first so mindful of others, gathering his children and his children's children to his bed-side, and breathing on them a fond benediction. But he now turns to *himself*. He has settled accounts with those near and dear to him. He has taken a touching (I had almost said a sublime) farewell; and now he begins to think of his own soul, and the great unknown on which he was about to enter.

How does he enter the dark valley? He seems to have caught up the words and the melody of a great descendant: "*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me; yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me,*"* (Ps. xxiii.) Fetch me—he seems to say—that pilgrim-crook. These hands can grasp it, though these eyes can see it no more. I shall love once again to lean upon it, and get absorbed in the remembrance of a faithful, covenant-keeping God! He does more. There is a brighter hope and nobler vision that fills his dying eye;—a nobler prop on which his aged frame and spirit repose. The old wrestler of Jabbok is again by his side, unfolding to him the great Redemption. So overpowered does he seem with the vision, that in the midst of the blessing of his sons he is obliged to pause. He interrupts the prophetic strain as he clasps his aged hands in ecstasy, and exclaims, "*I have waited for thy salvation, O God.*"† "I have waited;" "and now," he seems to say, "I have found it!" The chariots of salvation and the horses of fire are ready to bear him to "the Angel's" presence—the true Peniel—where he will see God

* See Sermon on this subject by Rev. H. Melvill, B.D.

† Gen. xlix. 18.

“face to face.” Like the patriarch of a future age, he had taken Christ in the arms of his faith, and he breathed away his spirit in a rapture of gospel triumph,—“*Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!*” *

* Luke ii. 29.

III.

Sunset on Mount Ephraim.

“ Of life's past toils, the fading trace
Hath given that aged patriarch's face
Expression holy, deep, resign'd,
The calm sublimity of mind.
Years o'er his snowy head have past,
And left him of his race the last,
Alone on earth ; but yet his mien
Is bright with majesty serene :
And those high hopes, whose guiding star
Shines from eternal worlds afar,
Have with that light illumed his eye
Whose fount is immortality ;
And o'er his features poured a ray
Of glory, not to pass away ;
One to sublimer worlds allied,
One from all passions purified,—
Even now half mingled with the sky,
And all prepared, oh, not to die,
But, like the prophet, to aspire
To heaven's triumphal car of fire !”

—HEMANS.

“ And it came to pass after these things, that JOSHUA THE SON OF NUN, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.”—JOSHUA xxiv. 29, 30.

SUNSET ON MOUNT EPHRAIM.

HERE is a glorious orb in the old world sinking peacefully to rest behind the pastoral hills of Ephraim.

JOSHUA was in every sense of the word a great character, a saintly hero,—the man not only of his age, but of many ages. If his name do not shine so conspicuously amid the galaxy of patriarchs and ancient worthies, it is very much because, as has been said of him, “the man himself is eclipsed by the brilliancy of his deeds:”—like the sun in a gorgeous western sky, when the pile of amber clouds—the golden linings and drapery with which he is surrounded—pale the lustre of the great luminary.

His was a varied and chequered career. What strange and stirring memories must have floated before his mental vision as now he closed his eyes in the quiet valley of *Timnath-serah!* Thirty-eight years he had been in Egypt—familiar from his childhood with the tale of his brethren’s bondage and oppression;—his young soul stung to the quick by their sufferings, and doubtless burning with ardent enthusiasm to redress their wrongs. His fond longings had been realised. He had taken no inconspicuous part in that marvellous exodus—when, in one night, a million slaves burst their fetters. For forty years he shared their toils and dangers in the Sinai deserts, amidst architecture grander and more imposing than the colossal forms of Egypt

—"temples not made with hands." He had triumphantly crossed the Jordan,—conquered the land which had gladdened the dying vision of Jacob and Joseph,—and struck terror and awe into the Canaanitish nations. First in the south, and then in the north, the warrior tribes bowed before his whirlwind marches. For several years previous to his death he was allowed to see the covenant people reposing under the shelter of their vines and fig-trees—the "sword turned into the ploughshare."

Of his last hours we know nothing. There are no remarkable incidents or details mentioned, as in the closing scene of Jacob's life. We have no family partings—no prophetic benedictions. He himself, we have every reason to believe, was the writer of the book which bears his name; and after his own final entry, another sacred recorder appends the post-script: "*And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-erah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.*"

This is a brief obituary. It allows no scope for imagination to paint the scene of the dying hero. If ever one was worthy of martial honours, it was he. The chivalry of Israel might well have gathered around his grave. His bier might have been covered with crowns of vanquished kings; even the savage warriors he had humbled, might not have refused to come and do homage to his valour. But his Life is his noblest monument;—His vast and varied achievements are his best panegyric. Let us gather, in thought, around that solitary tomb "on the north side of the hill of Gaash." We

can read the epitaph of "*the man of God*" as well as of the warrior and the patriot—"He being dead yet speaketh!"

Four elements of strength appear to stand out conspicuously in Joshua's character, and which distinguish him pre-eminently in the Old Testament as "*the Warrior SAINT.*"

First, *Zeal for God's honour.* —

This seemed to have been his paramount aim and motive through life. We trace, through all the vicissitudes of his history, a beautiful and never-varying abnegation of self, and exaltation of his great Lord—stripping himself of all personal glory, and giving the glory to whom alone it is due.

Take some examples:—

Witness at the miraculous passage through Jordan, when twelve stones are taken from the channel and set up in the fortified camp at Gilgal. "What mean ye by these stones?" Are they to perpetuate the completion of his campaign, that future generations may associate these river-banks with the name of the hero-leader? Nay—"And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. *For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of THE LORD, that IT is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever!*"*

When, under the walls of Jericho, a warrior-form with "a

* Josh. iv. 21-24.

sword drawn in his hand" stood "over against him." How does he receive the mysterious stranger? Flushed with previous successes, does he spurn the proffered assistance, and haughtily disdain the thought of any other, human, angelic or divine, dividing with him the glory of new conquests? No! When he heard from those august lips the announcement, "*As captain of the Lord's host I am come!*" the champion of Israel unlooses his shoe, in token of homage and deferential adoration. He bows his head in the dust, and, seeking no honour for himself, asks in simple faith the question, "*What saith my Lord unto his servant?*"*

Jericho and Ai have been conquered, and the key to the whole land is thus in the hands of the commander of the Israelite host. But before another sword is drawn, or martial bugle sounded, a religious convocation is appointed. The tones of the silver trumpets convene the whole army at the base of Mount Ebal; and, (in noble keeping with the monument erected after his first battle in Replidim, with the inscription, "Jehovah-nissi, the Lord is my banner,") Joshua rears an altar of gratitude "to the Lord God of Israel." †

Somewhere in the twilight of his life, when he imagined his end was drawing near, although he seems to have been spared for some years afterwards, we read, "*And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers.*" And how does he address them? Is it the warrior's stirring appeal to arms and fresh conquests; or the man of political sagacity and wordly wisdom seeking to consolidate his kingdom by arts of statecraft? No! it is the burning desire of his nobler nature

* Josh. v. 14.

† Josh. viii. 30.

to have another opportunity of ascribing all the glory of past victories to Jehovah, and of securing for HIM the willing homage and obedience of the nation. Hear the opening sentence—it is the key-note to the whole address:—“Ye have seen all *that the Lord your God hath done unto all the nations because of you: for the Lord your God is He that hath fought for you.*”*

How different from the tone of other oriental conquerors! How different from the promptings of nature! “*By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent.*”† The old hero convenes the aristocracy of the land—officers, elders, magistrates,—to give them a farewell charge;—and his first act is to tear every chaplet from his own brow, and to cast these at the feet of his father’s God! If he had given vent to the emotions of his heart in strains of sacred song, they would have been akin to those sung, in a future age, by the minstrel of the universal Church, as he reverted to this same bright epoch in their early history—“*They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.*”‡

A few years after this convocation at Shiloh, a final and still more impressive one took place at Shechem. The aged chief feels that the shadows are lengthening, that the silver cord must soon be loosed, the golden bowl soon broken. Might not he be well permitted to remain undisturbed in the peaceful seclusion of his inheritance, and leave the tribes with the faithful counsels he had already given them? What

* Josh. xxiii. 2, 3.

† Isa. x. 13.

‡ Ps. xliv. 3.

need of again invading his dignified repose? May not the entire consecration of his former years be pleaded as a valid reason for exemption from farther public duty? Nay! the venerable father (for he WAS the father—the oldest man in all Israel,) feels that life to the last has its solemn responsibilities. He seems to have caught up the words and spirit of a future apostle, “*Yea, I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle.*” And forth he comes, with patriarchal mien and silvered locks, from his dwelling in Mount Ephraim, to give the final exhortation, —to bear the final witness for his God, ere his lips are sealed for ever. As he began, so he finishes—“*The Lord our God, He it is that brought us up out of the land of Egypt.*” Oh, sweeter to him than the strains of sweetest earthly music must have been that parting burst from the assembled tribes that rang through the rugged defile! It was the echo of his own life-thoughts. It seemed like the anointing for his own burial as he departed for the last time from the host, never to see them again:—“*The people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey!*”

How stands it with us? Are God's glory and honour paramount? or are we content with seeking our own glory, our own projects of self-aggrandisement and worldly ambition; living for anything but the God who loved us, and the Saviour who died for us? If the Israel of a succeeding age had taken heed to the words of their hero-leader, it would have saved them many a conflict; much bloodshed, humiliation, and disaster. Contrary to his dying advice, they *did* tamper with the neighbouring idolatrous nations, and entered

on forbidden fellowships. The purity of worship was corrupted, Jehovah was displeased, and vengeance followed. "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*"* Faithful to Him, he will be faithful to you. His own promise will be verified in your experience as in that of Joshua, "*Them that honour me, I will honour!*"

A second feature in Joshua's character was his *deference to God's law*.

We have just seen that, warrior as he was, he rejoiced in acknowledging his own subordination to a Greater than himself. Like every true and loyal soldier, he acted up to the orders of his superior. When, on the death of Moses, God invested him with the responsible post of commander-in-chief of the army of Israel, the first—the only injunction which, with reiterated emphasis, was laid upon him was this—"Only be thou strong, and very courageous, that *thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee*: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. *This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*" †

It is a noble and interesting picture, to see the youthful soldier, ay,—and when the ardour of youthful enthusiasm had passed away, and care was furrowing his brow,—to see the aged warrior retiring amid the seclusion of his own tent, and

* Heb. iii. 12.

† Josh. i. 7, 8.

poring over the sacred law transmitted to him by his great predecessor. If any could ever plead lack of time or of leisure, surely it would be this great man, who had the burden of thousands upon thousands on his shoulders ; and whose whole life was one long warlike march,—the sword scarce ever sheathed, or the armour ungirded ! But he was faithful to the great trust confided to him. His guiding principle was undeviating adherence to the Divine word and will.

See how the Law of God is honoured in that sublime convocation we have already referred to, at Mount Ebal and Gerizim. One portion of the tribes,—the chiefs, the judges, the officers, the elders,—stood on the one mountain, and another portion on the other ; while the sacred ark, guarded by the priests, was in the valley beneath. It was the *Word of God* that awoke those silent echoes ! “ *And Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.* ” * The six tribes on dark and gloomy Ebal, thundered out its curses ; and back from the greener slopes of Gerizim, from the corresponding number of tribes, were echoed the blessings ; while from the serried ranks that thronged both hills, there followed the loud “ AMEN ! ”—the solemn national subscription to each blessing and curse of that precious *Word*. To crown and perpetuate all ;—on that commemorative “ altar of whole stones ” which Joshua reared on Mount Ebal, a copy of the law of Moses was written or engraven by his own hand, in presence of the assenting multitude.

This convocation of the tribes took place while yet they were engaged in the strife of conquest,—a solemn breathing-

* Josh. viii. 34.

time amid the din and dust of battle. But when "*the land had rest from war,*" and Joshua was drawing near the close of his eventful life, so far from his love and veneration for that law suffering any diminution, he seems to rejoice in it still, "as one that findeth great spoil." While he could say, in reverting to the past, "*Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage,*" it seems no less to be his experience when old and grey-headed, "*Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.*" On that same occasion to which reference has already been made, when in the decline of years the aged chieftain gathered together the tribes from their different inheritances, still does he revert to the same theme. He tells them as the secret of his own success, and he would urge it upon them as the secret of *theirs*, "Be ye therefore very courageous, *to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses; that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left.*"*

And again, as he had done years before at Ebal, he took means alike to perpetuate his own sacred counsel and the vow of the people. He transcribed the account of the whole transaction into the copy of the book of the law which was kept in the ark; and then a huge stone was set up under a terebinth, as a silent attestation to the oath of the tribes. "*And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall therefore be a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.*"† What a lesson for us! He had but a fragment of that divine law—the books of Moses (the Pentateuch and the

* Josh. xxiii. 6.

† Josh. xxiv. 27.

book of Job) were all his Bible. Yet see how he makes it "the man of his counsel,"—pleads earnestly with the people to take heed to its sacred utterances, and to regulate their lives by its lofty requirements!

Amid the duties and difficulties, the cares and perplexities of life, how many a pang and tear would it save us, if we went with chastened and inquiring spirits to these sacred oracles? How many trials would be mitigated,—how many sorrows soothed, and temptations avoided,—if we preceded every step in life with the inquiry, "*What saith the Scripture?*" How few, it is to be feared, make (as they should do) the Bible a final court of appeal—an arbiter for the settlement of all the vexed questions in the consistory of the soul. God keep us from that saddest phase and dogma of modern infidelity,—the Sacred Volume classed among the worn and effete books of the past! God keep us from regarding His lively oracles with only that misnamed "*veneration*" which the antiquary bestows on some piece of mediæval armour—a relic and memorial of bygone days, but unsuitable for an age which has superseded the cruder views of these old "chroniclers," and inaugurated a new era of religious development. Vain dreamers! "*For ever, O God, thy word is settled in heaven.*" "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.*" "*The word of the Lord is tried.*" "*Thy word is very sure, therefore thy servant loveth it.*" What a crowd of witnesses could be summoned to give personal evidence of its preciousness and value. How many aching heads would raise themselves from their pillows and tell of their obligations to its soothing messages

of love and power ! How many death-beds could send their occupants with pallid lips to tell of the staff which upheld them in the dark valley ! How many, in the hour of bereavement, could lay their finger on the promise that first dried the tear from their eye, and brought back the smile to their saddened countenances ! How many voyagers in life's tempestuous ocean, now landed on the heavenly shore, would be ready to hush their golden harps and descend to earth with the testimony, that this was the blessed beacon-light which enabled them to avoid the treacherous reefs, and guided them to their desired haven !

Ah, *Philosophy* ! thou hast never yet, as *this* Book, taught a man how to die ! *Reason* ! with thy flickering torch, thou hast never yet guided to such sublime mysteries, such comforting truths as these ! *Science* ! thou hast penetrated the arcana of nature, sunk thy shafts into earth's recesses, unburied its stores, counted its strata, measured the height of its massive pillars, down to the very pedestals of primeval granite. Thou hast tracked the lightning, traced the path of the tornado, uncurtained the distant planet, foretold the coming of the comet, and the return of the eclipse. But thou hast never been able to gauge the depths of man's soul ; or to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved ?"

No, no : this antiquated volume is still the "Book of books," the oracle of oracles, the beacon of beacons ; the poor man's treasury ; the child's companion ; the sick man's health ; the dying man's life ; shallows for the infant to walk in,—depths for giant intellect to explore and adore ! Philosophy, if she would but own it, is indebted here for the noblest of her maxims :—Poetry for the loftiest of her

themes. Painting has gathered here her noblest inspiration. Music has ransacked these golden stores for the grandest of her strains. And if there be life in the Church of Christ,—if her ministers and missionaries are carrying the torch of salvation through the world,—where is that torch lighted, but at these same undying altar-fires? When a philosophy, “falsely so called,” shall become dominant, and seek, with its proud dogmas, to supersede this *divine* philosophy;—when the old Bible of Joshua, and David, and Timothy, and Paul, is clasped and closed,—the only morality and philosophy worth speaking of, will have perished from the earth. Dagon will have taken the place of God’s ark—the world’s funeral pile may be kindled!

Love your Bibles. As they are the *souvenirs* of your earliest childhood;—the gift of a mother’s love, or the pledge of a father’s affection;—so let them be your last and fondest treasures,—the keepsakes and heirlooms which you are most desirous to transmit to your children’s children.

A *third* feature in the character of Joshua was, *dependence on God’s strength*.

“*Certainly I will be with thee,*” was the guarantee with which he accepted his onerous responsibilities as leader of the many thousands of Israel. “*As I have been with Moses, so will I be with thee.*” “*Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*” These assurances seem to have rung their echoes in his ear from the moment he entered on his gigantic task. In the hour of disaster he casts himself

humbled before the "Rock of his strength." He tempers and glorifies the hour of victory by ascribing all the praise to the same "God of Jeshurun." On the occasion of the temporary repulse at Ai,—when the picked men of the host fled panic-stricken before the Canaanite warriors, "and the hearts of the people melted and became like water,"—where do we find their leader? Is he (stung with the humiliation of defeat) venting his wrath against the demoralised army? twitting the vanquished with their cowardice? or, worse, in sullen remorse upbraiding his God for desertion at this crisis-hour? Nay, we see him prone on the earth, with dust on his head, and his garments rent, before the ark of the Lord. The men of Ai, flushed with victory, may, for aught he knows, be in hot pursuit down through their gorges to Gilgal. It matters not. He neither fears nor trusts to an arm of flesh. Nor is this a mere momentary burst of impassioned prayer. In that posture he and his elders continue till even-tide, jealous for the glory of his God, and acknowledging His hand alone in the discomfiture. Thus does the prostrate leader urge his sacred suit: "*O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land, shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*"

Or turn to the brightest episode—the most picturesque and chivalrous chapter in all Joshua's history—his campaign against the Amorite kings, and subjugation of Southern Canaan.

The five kings of the south had become confederate

against the Gibeonites. These latter, in their hour of imminent peril, resolved to seek the assistance of Joshua. Ambassadors from their helpless city appear one afternoon at the camp of Gilgal with the importunate request—“*Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us.*” Joshua at once perceives the urgency of the crisis. It is his own cause fully more than that of the Gibeonites. He responds at once to the call of duty and danger. Nor need he hesitate. The God who nerved his arm has given him the assurance, “*Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.*”

Not a moment, however, is to be lost. At the ordinary rate of marching, it will take three days to reach the beleaguered garrison. The tidings reach Joshua at eventide, and, ere the sun has gone down on the heights of Jericho, the army is in motion, and by a rapid starlight march, early morning brings them face to face with their foe. The war-note sounds! the battle closes! and the five confederate armies,—broken and scattered,—flee headlong down the western passes of Benjamin; thence upwards by the heights of Beth-horon. Joshua is in hot pursuit. The victory cannot be complete unless advantage be taken of the panic. If they slack their march, or if the shadows of evening fall before they have overtaken the fugitives, the broken ranks of the enemy may on the morrow be rallied, and another bloody struggle undo the triumph of to-day. What can he devise? One night and morning have worked marvels. Heroism could do no more;—three days’ march compressed into one;—five puissant kings with disciplined troops humbled and

discomfited by a tribe of desert wanderers. Faint and weary as these brave heroes are, they would willingly yet struggle on for hours to finish their mission of death and victory. But they cannot fight against nature—they cannot contend with impossibilities. Joshua, at the head of the Beth-horon mountain-ridge, gazes along to his right on the undulating hills which now hide Gibeon from view. He sees the sun hanging over them in fiery lustre,—that blazing lamp which had looked down upon their fearful struggle during the long morning, till noonday heat, perhaps, compelled the weary warriors to pause for a breath under the shadow of the surrounding rocks. The enemy had more to contend with than the swords of the Israelites. As in a future campaign “the stars in their courses fought against Sisera,” so now the very elements of nature become confederate with Joshua, and wage vengeance on the foe. The terrific hail-storm—truly “the hail of God”—arrows from the Almighty’s quiver—was driving in the faces of the broken chivalry of Canaan, and “the faint figure of the crescent moon visible above the hail-storm” * rose over the green valley of Ajalon, down which the discomfited legions were pouring in wild confusion.

Can He who maketh the “fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind to fulfil His word”—can He who “appointeth the moon for seasons, and the sun to know his going down,”—can He not, if he please, arrest the movements of nature, even should it be to stay the orbs of heaven in their course? Can He not rein in these fiery coursers, put a drag on these burning chariot-wheels, as He did on those of

* Stanley’s “Sinai and Palestine,” p. 208.

Pharaoh in the depths of the sea? Can He not lengthen out this momentous day, and suffer neither sun nor moon to stir from their places, until victory resound through the hosts of Israel?

So mused Joshua, as he stood in silent contemplation on these memorable heights. “*Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. . . . And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.*”*

We pause not to ask any curious questions as to how this miracle can be reconciled with the conditions of modern science, although we believe it *can*, without impairing the reality of the miracle. We advert to it at present as a beautiful testimony to Joshua’s dependence on the omnipotence of God. “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” was the inmost thought of his soul, when he ventured on the strange request. The two obedient orbs were arrested till the triumph was complete, and till they beheld, from their silent thrones, the five warlike kings mingling with the trophies of that bloody day.

And how terminates the record of this bright and brilliant campaign,—the *Marathon* of ancient Canaan? We extract it from the book of Joshua (and remember, Joshua was himself the recorder of the fact and of the cause assigned

* Josh. x. 12-14.

for it):—“*And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, BECAUSE THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL FOUGHT FOR ISRAEL.*”*

Would that, in our seasons of sorrow, and trial, and threatened bereavement, we could imitate the faith of this hero-saint. When some “sun,” some orb of earthly joy is threatening to set in the darkness of death, can that same omnipotent One who said, “*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon,*” can He not still, as of old, in answer to prayer, command these lights of our firmament to “stand still,” and forbid them “going down while it is yet day?” Why should we “limit the Holy One of Israel?” Is the Lord’s hand shortened since the days of Joshua that it cannot save?

What a lesson, too, of dependence on Almighty strength in spiritual exigences! And the beautiful and instructive example, in the case of Israel’s leader, is, that his is no rash or feverish fanaticism—no blind fatalism—no unwarrantable trust in extraordinary or superhuman agency, so as to permit dispensing with human effort. There is the fine combination of entire dependence on God, with the conviction of human responsibility, as if each warlike movement depended on his own personal prowess. He had the firm persuasion that in himself he had no power against these giant walls or confederate multitudes. He went in “the strength of the Lord his God.” But even after receiving the assurance of Divine aid, and the promise of victory, there was no relaxation of personal effort. Never did soldier go forth with a more firm resolve to do his

* Josh x. 42.

duty. The assurance of triumph did not tempt him to defer his midnight march on Gibeon, or lessen his resolve to strike a sudden blow. It is said of him "*he drew not back his hand when he stretched out his spear;*" and yet, at the same time, no warrior of Scripture story bears about with him a more habitual recognition of the truth that "the shields of the earth belong only to God." Let the same beautiful combination be ours!—a simple dependence on the grace and strength of God,—cherishing habitually the feeling that if a better Canaan ever be ours, "not unto us, not unto us," but unto God be the glory,—and yet acting as if all depended on ourselves. The two are not incompatible. It will always be found that those who are the most earnest workers are those who exercise the most childlike trust in a higher strength. The oars are strong, but we must ply them if we would overcome the opposing current. The armour may be well proved, but we must assay it if we would gain the battle. "Prayer and pains," said the missionary Elliot, "can do anything;" and this was in spirit Joshua's motto and watchword. He who had boldness to tell sun and moon to "stand still" is the same we see lying prostrate for hours in prayer within the camp of Gilgal. His life is one of the many testimonies that it is the men of prayer who are men of power. The first time he is brought before our notice is as the young warrior fighting the veteran hosts of Amalek at Rephidim; but he looks up to the adjoining mount and beholds Moses with his hands uplifted in *prayer*—"Out of weakness he is made strong, waxes valiant in fight, and turns to flight the armies of the aliens."

This is a picture of every Christian still. He is the suc-

cessful *Joshua* in the plain, because he looks with the eye of faith to the great pleading Intercessor on the true mount in heaven, whose hands never "grow heavy;" for "He fainteth not, neither is weary." "*Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.*" *

Let us advert to one other element in *Joshua's* character. *Trust in God's faithfulness.* —

This was only the necessary concomitant and result of the preceding. Let us speak of it more in connexion with the closing period of his life, when he came to take a retrospect of his past history.

When he first undertook to lead the armies of Israel, this was the warrant and encouragement on which he set out:— "*I the Lord am with thee whithersoever thou goest.*" No promise could have been stronger or more unqualified. "*There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.*"

Have these repeated asseverations been rigidly fulfilled? Has "He been faithful that promised?"

"Yes," says *Joshua*; "God has been true to His word. He has been better than His word!" When the land had been partitioned to the various tribes, he records this emphatic attestation, "*There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass.*" †

It is a beautiful picture to see this burning and shining

* Ps. xciv. 17, 18.

† Josh. xxi. 45

light of the old firmament nearing his glorious sunset!—this old warrior of Israel thus coming forth from the seclusion of his old age to bear witness to the faithfulness of a promising God! His public work is over—his sword is sheathed—his spear and shield are resting as proud trophies in his family halls at Timnath, never more to be taken down. But he appears once more as the great apostle of the covenant people, to pour upon them his benediction, and make a farewell acknowledgment of God's gracious and unchanging fidelity.

Though "old and stricken in years," he was yet strong in body as he was strong in faith; and able with his tongue to give glory to God. He seems to catch animation and power from the spectacle before him;—the thousands of Israel, that loved him as a father, gathering at his call, and listening with bated breath to his last words. Imagine the scene! as with simple but noble eloquence, the patriarch warrior makes the appeal, "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your Fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!*" The enthusiasm of the speaker seems to be communicated to his hearers! With tumultuous acclamation they make the united response, "*And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods. . . . therefore will we also serve the Lord; for he is our God!*"*

We like to hear (there is always weight and authority) in the sayings of the *aged*. There are no words that come to

* Josh. xxiv. 18.

us in our pulpits with such solemnity and interest as those spoken by the veteran warriors of the cross—patriarchs in Israel ;—whose shattered bark has braved many a storm, and whose brows are furrowed with life's deep and changing experiences. And if the man, moreover, has been conspicuous in the world—one of towering intellect, or brilliant genius, or illustrious deeds—with all the greater interest do we hang upon his lips.

Such was Joshua. Come: thou mighty man of valour! thou before whom “kings of armies did flee apace!” Come, tell us, in the evening of thy life, what is thy experience.

Hear it :—“ *Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.*”*

If we (like Joshua) combine the power of faith with the power of earnest effort; if we use the two means which he seems specially to have used, (the word of God and prayer,) like him, we shall be able at our dying hour, to declare the faithfulness of the Lord, and to say, in the words of a future leader of Israel, who in no small degree inherited Joshua's spirit, “ *Come, hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.*”† As sure as Joshua's zeal and trust and fortitude crowned his arms with victory,—so surely, if we, in the noble gospel sense, “quit us like men, and be strong,” God will give us the rest He promises—the rest which remains for His people. Joshua's “good success” has in it a higher spiritual meaning and interpretation. **It**

* Josh. xxiii. 14.

† Ps. lxvi. 16.

was written "for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world have come." And this is the burden of the spiritual promise, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.*"*

Let us learn, in conclusion, the same great practical lesson we shall have so often to note in connexion with these ancient worthies—the influence that a great and good man exercises on others. The influence of Joshua was felt for a whole generation. At the close of that last stirring appeal—(his farewell address)—the concluding words of the record, written by his own hand, were these, "*So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.*" It is a mere casual remark, a simple winding up of the story, and yet imagination loves to dwell on that "departure." We picture group upon group wending their way along highway and valley;—some immersed in deep thought, others breaking forth in the votive soliloquy, "*Nay, but we will serve the Lord:*"—others, as they reached their homes, pouring out their full hearts to their children, repeating the words of the saintly warrior. Ay, and in future ages, on their way to the feasts, as many passed by that stone under the Terebinth at Shechem, how would it recall the living voice of the hero, and enforce, in silent impressiveness, the terms of his covenant.

This we know at all events, that the fragrance of his good words and deeds survived his death. The writer, whoever he be, who records his departure and burial, adds the brief notice—it is the best funeral oration that could be pronounced over his grave,—"*And Israel served the Lord all*

* Rev. ii. 10.

*the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord that he had done for Israel.”**

Joshua was a great man, and his influence was therefore correspondingly great. But each one, however lowly be their sphere, may exercise a similar influence for good. They may erect their Shechem-stone, and their children's children may catch inspiration from lips which death has long ago silenced! As the youth, plunged amid the temptations of a city life, opens his desk, his eye may light on a Shechem-stone—the last letter of a parent's affection, full of the yearnings of holy solicitude; or the Bible, with its fly-leaf blotted with a mother's love and tears. That mother may have been sleeping quietly for years under some yew-tree in a village church-yard hundreds of miles away; but her voice still speaks,—the old tones, choked with tears, are heard,—the hand that was wont to be laid on his head in prayer as he knelt on her lap, knocks at his heart-door, and does not knock in vain!

Happy and honoured are they who, like Joshua, can give a bold, outspoken testimony to the truth! Though he died amid the affections of a loving people, his was not an influence or an attachment purchased by any base or unworthy compromise of principle. There was no truckling to their weaknesses or foibles. It was the influence of a faithful as well as kind man. He was one of those “righteous” who are as “bold as a lion.” One of his last utterances was a faithful warning—a warning off from that very rock on which thousands on thousands are at this day making shipwreck—

* Josh. xxiv. 31.

a false and ungospel trust in the mere mercy of God,—a sinful and unwarrantable ignoring of God in his character of the Just, and Holy, and Righteous One!—“*And Joshua said unto them, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.*”

Did the people resent his manly straightforward declaration? Nay, they loved him too much,—they trusted him too much,—to take offence at these bold averments; their voices again rang through the defile, “*Nay, but we will serve the Lord.*”

Are we ready to go and do likewise? Are we ready, like the tribes of Israel, anew to subscribe our covenant, and to say with a more earnest resolve, that “*whatsoever others do, as for us we will serve the Lord?*” We may well take the life of this brave and good man as an outline—a model—for our imitation, in fighting “the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life!” A life of calm trust and submission to the divine will brought with it a peaceful and tranquil departure. Hear how he speaks of death—“*I am going the way of all the earth.*” He looks on the world he is soon about to leave—What does he see? A troop of pilgrims marching to one long home. “All the earth” one vast funeral crowd rushing on to the grave! None had ever seen so many entering its portals as he. He had left Egypt with six hundred thousand—he had seen every one of them (save one solitary man, Caleb,) pass to that long home. He was now himself following—ready to enter the “house ap-

pointed for all living." But the same Warrior, who stood at his side before the walls of Jericho, is there, to make him "*more than conqueror!*"

And the same Lord, who upheld and sustained Joshua, will be with you! "*Joshua-Jesus,*"—He who stands for your defence, amid life's temptations and trials, with the sword drawn in His hand—He who, when Moses, the type of the *law*, dies, brings His spiritual Israel to the true land of promise. Yes, and when you come, like this old hero-saint, to take farewell of all that is under the sun, when you come to take your stand by the dark river side, the voice of the true Joshua (like that of his illustrious forerunner,) will be heard saying, "*Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan!*"

IV.

A Troubled Sunset.

“I go not like one in the strength of youth,
Who hopes, though the passing cloud
May pour down its icy hail amain,
That summer and sunshine will break out again
The brighter from sorrow’s shroud.

“An April morn and a clouded day
My portion of life hath been ;
And darker and darker the evening sky
Stretches before me gloomily,
To the verge of the closing scene.

“Gloomily darkens the evening sky :
I shall go with a heavy heart ;—
Yet would I change, if the power were mine,
One tittle decreed by the will Divine ?—
Oh, no ! not a thousandth part.”

—BOWLES.

“And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. And when he came, lo, ELI sat upon a seat by the way-side watching : for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult ? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old ; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son ? And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died ; for he was an old man, and heavy : and he had judged Israel forty years.”—
1 SAMUEL iv. 12-19

A TROUBLED SUNSET.

MOURNFUL is it to see the life of a great and good man terminate in trouble and sorrow ;—to see the sun which has held on a glorious course through bright skies during a long summer day, go down at his setting mantled in lowering clouds,—a pillow of gloom and darkness.

Such is the closing scene in the life of ELI, the aged Priest, Ruler, and Judge of Israel. Ninety-eight years have furrowed his brow with wrinkles and dimmed his eye with blindness, as we see him sitting, in an agony of emotion, on the way-side near the gate of Shiloh.

The Philistines (the old enemy of his nation) had come up against them in battle on the preceding day at Ebenezer. The fight had ended in the discomfiture of the hosts of Israel. The news of disaster and defeat had spread. Four thousand noble Hebrews lay stretched on that bloody plain, and when the retreating host fell back on their tents, a loud wail burst from the elders of the people—“ *Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?* ”*

Is there no way of retrieving their disaster? Doubtless on the morrow, the warriors of Philistia will follow up their triumph ; and years of servitude and oppression may be the result of a second defeat. They bethink themselves of what should have occurred to them long before now. The Ark of God, the pledge and symbol of victory in times gone by, was

* 1 Sam. iv. 3.

not many leagues distant from their encampment, within the gates of Shiloh. Might they not send fleet-footed messengers to request of old Eli, its custodier and guardian, that the sacred symbol might be sent without delay. It might form yet a rallying point for the discomfited ranks, revive drooping hearts, and nerve for the morrow's struggle. The aged priest assents. He cannot himself accompany it,—his years—his sightless eyes—his shattered frame—could not stand the hurry of the march and feverish excitements of the battle. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are, however, ready for the exploit. They are the bearers of the sacred chest. The old man is able only to follow them and their consecrated burden to the city gate. There he seats himself, uttering, (perhaps, with trembling lips,) his benediction, till the noise of their footfall dies away in the distance. In other circumstances, a father's heart would have swelled with patriot-pride to see his children going forth, bearers of the great standard of their nation—that which was more to the “sons of Abraham” than the proud eagle ever was to the legions of imperial Rome, and which, in older and better times, both in the wilderness and Canaan, out of weakness had made strong, imparted valour in fight, and “turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” His spirit, too, might have revived, had he listened to the frantic shout of joy which rose from the ranks of Israel as they saw the palladium of their liberty come into their midst. *“All Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.”**

But ah! there were mingled thoughts in that old man's

* 1 Sam. iv. 5.

breast, as his dull ear caught the last sound of these retreating steps. Amid the wreck of memory, he could not forget that dark and solemn night when, within the hallowed curtains of Shiloh, the voice of a little child (the very child he had with fondest love adopted as his own, and like a tender lamb nestled in his bosom), the voice of that child uttered, in the name of Israel's God, accents of stern doom and disaster against his house—tidings which would “make the ears” of every one that heard them “to tingle.” The burden of the Divine communication was, that the Lord “*would judge the house of Eli for ever, for the iniquity which he knew; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*” * Twenty years had rolled by since the first utterance of these prophetic warnings. Had the Lord become slack concerning His threatenings, because sentence against their evil works was not executed speedily? Does the old Priest and Judge imagine that God has retracted or modified His solemn averments? He knew better. The cloud has for years been gathering;—and now in this war-tempest that is blackening the political heavens, he fancies he reads too truthfully the omens of approaching disaster. The coming event, anticipated for well nigh a quarter of his protracted life, now casts a deeper shadow on his path; and stinging must have been the aggravation of his woe, that he was himself the guilty cause of impending judgment, that, but for his parental neglect—culpable parental fondness—he might have transmitted an unsullied name from generation to generation, his children rising up and calling him blessed.

* 1 Sam. iii. 13.

Other and gloomy thoughts, too, crowded upon him. "*His heart trembled for the ark of God.*" Strong as were his feelings of parental solicitude, a deeper and intenser anxiety was gathered around that holy treasure, of which he was delegated keeper. The failing of Eli's whole character was irresolution—indecision—a facile, easy, wavering temper—"a righteous man," but he was not "bold as a lion." His weakness was manifested alike in his family and in his government. It was mainly by reason of his irresolute sway the state was now hovering on the brink of ruin. His conduct at this solemn crisis, regarding the ark, as alike High priest and Chief magistrate, illustrates his administrative incapacity. That ark either ought not to have been trusted in the battle at all, or it ought to have been there when Israel first marched to the field. It ought to have formed the rallying point of the fight of yesterday as well as of to-day. It was little else than an insult to Him who dwelt between its cherubims, to neglect the symbol of His presence, until the hour of disaster and defeat forced them to an acknowledgment of His hand. They went out to the first battle to meet their old enemy, confident in their own prowess; and now, it was only when their ranks are broken, that they have recourse to the consecrated shrine. They flee to God when they cannot help it. They flee to Him only when their own bruised reeds have failed—as a last resort—the forlorn hope of their demoralised and discomfited squadrons.

No wonder, then, that that old man sits by the way-side tremulous and fearful, stretching out his palsied and withered hands to every passer-by for tidings of the fray. His was indeed an accumulated load of anxiety and woe.

The Army. Might not the uncircumcised Philistines be already rejoicing over "the beauty of Israel slain in high places?" Might not that evening sun be already setting on fields of carnage and blood, and leave a thousand Rachels weeping and refusing to be comforted?

His Sons. Once the pride of his heart—but, alas! on whom now rested the brand and curse of God—the shadows of time, followed by the gloom of a darker hereafter!

The ARK. Could it be hurried once more amid the defiled fires of Philistian altars?—polluted with the incense offered to Chemosh and Dagon?

Oh! it was a lifetime hurried into a few eventful hours. How heavily would the moments drag along till the terrible suspense was relieved! At last, the moment has come! A haggard messenger—a man of Benjamin, a fugitive from battle, supposed in Jewish tradition to be Saul,—with rent garments, and dust on his head,—speeds him to the gates of Shiloh. Had Eli's eyes been as once they were, he would not have required to ask so eagerly the fate of the day;—the symbols of woe and defeat, in the torn dress and earth-be-sprinkled head, would have made known too truly the worst. A loud wail is carried to his ear from the city!—Stretching forth his withered arms, he exclaims,—"*What meaneth the noise of this tumult? What is there done, my son?*"

Touching is the reply. Bolt after bolt pierces his soul! Wave upon wave,—and each succeeding one sadder than the last,—rolls in upon him! It is a succession of cruel tidings rising to a terrible and significant climax.

Mark them! "*And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines!*" That is the first,

and sad enough is the announcement. Still, the old man might cling to the hope that matters might not be desperate. It might be more perhaps of a strategic movement;—the messenger, in too hot haste, may have exaggerated or misapprehended; or, if a temporary repulse, at least, there might be little bloodshed, and, rallying their broken ranks, the fortune of the hour might already be retrieved!

But the next sentence of the message extinguishes these hopes. “*There hath been also a great slaughter among the people!*” It has been a grievous discomfiture! “*Philistia has triumphed.*” The pride and flower of Israel has fallen;—and the cry of orphanage and widowhood shall be heard in many desolate homes!

Is there not yet a ray of hope for the *parent's* heart? Amid these thousands whose blood is staining the plains of Aphek, is it possible that the two forms he has been following all day in anxious thought may yet be spared? that God may in mercy close His own eyes before He executes His denunciations regarding *them*? But this is the burden of the third portion of the message,—“*Thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead.*”

One and only one gleam still remains in this wreck of life—to one plank alone, does the old castaway still cling amid these buffeting waves. Israel may have fallen!—Rachels may be weeping!—Philistia may have conquered!—the fruit of his own body may be lying amid the heaps of gory slain. But if the *Ark* be still intact—unpolluted, unviolated by uncircumcised hands, he will stem the torrent of burning grief. All may yet be well. The hopes of Israel are not irretrievably annihilated. If the old symbol of God's favour

be still in the hands of the feeble remnant, who can tell but it may, ere the morrow's dawn, work wonders as of old; and that at the ancestral battle-cry uttered over it, "*Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered:*" God will prove to be "*in the midst of them; they shall not be moved: the Lord shall help them, and that right early.*"

But the last tidings is the saddest of all. The messenger rises to a gloomy *climax*, "*and the ark of God is taken!*" It is enough;—the old man can bear up no more! He can listen with comparative calmness to the tidings of national disaster,—death,—family bereavement; but when the crowning woe of woes reaches his ear—that "the glory of Israel"—its jewel and crown—has ignominiously fallen;—he cannot survive the shock. Like aged Jacob, he can say with an intenser bitterness, "*I am bereaved!*" The old palm-tree quivers at its roots. "*And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died.*"* That sun, which for forty years had been the political and ecclesiastical light of Israel, now sets behind their mountains in the darkest shadows of death.

Let us endeavour to draw one or two practical lessons from this touching story.

It contains a special lesson to *parents*, and a general lesson to *all*.

The first and most patent, surely, is a lesson to *parents*.

What a heritage of sorrow and suffering might not Eli have warded off, by filiality to that immortal trust confided to

* 1 Sam. iv. 18.

him. He was in many things worthy of all commendation. He was, we have reason to believe, "an Israelite indeed." He loved the God of his fathers. He was jealous for His glory. He treasured, with patriot fidelity, the symbol of His presence. As a man and a parent, too, he was not stern or repulsive or vindictive. He was evidently of a kindly nature ;—his tender affection for young Samuel is one of the most touching episodes in sacred story. What a proof of his meekness and childlike spirit was his conduct, on hearing from those infant lips, the doleful tidings of wrath and judgment ! How many would have received the withering communication, and that too from the mouth of a child, with fierce indignation ! How many would in wrath have spurned the tiny messenger of evil away, and rejected his message as a piece of puerile presumption, a frightening dream of infancy ! But there is no frown on his brow. This "still small voice" brings him, like the prophet of Horeb, to stand wrapt in his mantle, calm, submissive, self-convicted and self-condemned, and to say—(oh, considering *such* a wound in a parent's heart, how great the effort, how strong the faith to be able to say it,) "*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*"

But notwithstanding much (very much) that was laudable and loveable in his character, he had suffered youthful folly to go unchecked ;—he had looked on the first outbreak of vice in the young tyrants of his household with a too lenient eye ;—he had nestled the snake too fondly and too thoughtlessly. A few judicious words—a few loving counsels—a few firm prohibitions timeously addressed to these lawless boys, might have saved him many a bitter hour and bitter tear. But from motives of false delicacy, or indecision, or

indifference, he did not repress the beginnings of evil. What was the result? Shame in Israel, dishonour to God, national disaster, a violent death!

Let parents lay these things to heart. There is among all a natural partiality for their own children. When *they* see family wrecks around, they cannot bring themselves to believe that it could be so with theirs. "Others," they are apt to say, "of baser natures, of wicked dispositions, ungovernable tempers; the children of profligate parents, who have been nurtured under the shadow of evil example, and who bore from their cradles the stamp of ungodliness,—we wonder not at hearing of their worthlessness and ruin: but no fear of ours. Their temperament is of a different cast. We need not be so fastidious—so watchful. We can leave them very much to themselves. Restraint—too much tension—will only end in a greater rebound. As for some early outbreaks, they are only the usual manifestations to be expected of youthful folly;—they will cure themselves. We must not press matters too hard, or domineer with too high a hand."

"*It is good that a man bear the yoke in his YOUTH.*"* A word spoken *then*, in due season, how good it is! It is easy to bend the sapling—not so easy to bend the tree. "Train up" (not the *youth*,—not when on the threshold of manhood or womanhood)—but "train up a *child* in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." † Eli, indeed, we find reasoning and expostulating with his sons, "*And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye*

* Lam. iii. 27.

† Prov. xxii. 6.

make the Lord's people to transgress." Alas! these gentle chidings came too late. "*Notwithstanding they hearkened not to the voice of their father.*" Unchecked and unbridled boyhood led to dissolute youth; and then the course was rapidly downward, headlong to destruction!

Ay, and the bitterest part of it all, to a heart like Eli's, must have been the *second* death. The words of the child Samuel are among the most awful in the Bible—"I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." It reminds one of another parent in Israel in similar circumstances. What was the terrible element of David's grief in the touching lament for Absalom? It seems to lie in the middle clause of that piercing elegy, "*Would God I had died for thee!*" as if he had said, "If it had been *myself* and not *thee*, there would have been need of no such bitter tears. To *me*, it would have been a gain to die—for the God I serve hath 'made with me an everlasting covenant.' But, alas! '*my house is not so with God!*' I have no such joyous hope hovering over thy early grave. 'O Absalom, Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for *THEE*, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" *

There is, in a review of Eli's history and character, a general lesson to *all*.

There is a lesson to *Sinners*. Learn from Eli's death, that God will not wink at sin. Even when He sees it in His own people, He *will* punish it. If He spared not this good and holy saint,—this long-trying priest and judge in Israel;—if

* 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

He spared not "the branch His own right hand planted," take heed, sinner, lest he spare not thee!

Sentence against Eli's evil works (his sins of omission) was not executed speedily. Israel, who doubtless knew the doom hanging over his house, might think and say,—“The God who uttered these stern things is to have mercy on his hoary hairs. Whatever He may do to Eli's abandoned sons, He will let the old man, first of all, die in peace, and be gathered to his fathers.”

No, no, aged servant of God! the thorn shall pierce thine unpillowed head! the scorpions of vengeance shall yet overtake thee! Thou shalt, in thy clouded sunset, be another beacon to all time,—another attestation to the truth of the words, “*Be sure your sin will find you out!*”

And if God thus dealt with a holy, meek, gentle, child-like saint,—careless one! say, how will He deal with *thee*? “*If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*” Oh! as we see the poor, helpless, unbefriended, blind man, staggering back on his seat by the wayside; and dying, pierced with worse than a thousand Philistian arrows;—as we see the venerable tree of God, which had been rooted for a century on the high hills of Israel, wrenched up by the roots in a moment by the terrible blast,—may we not well exclaim, in the words of the prophet to the worthless children of the forest all around,—“*Howl fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!*”*

There is a lesson to *Saints*, to Believers, to the Church! It is a lesson for imitation! Would that there were more among us who died like Eli, with a tear in our eye for the ark

* Zech. xi. 2.

of God! Beautiful was that solicitude of his for the sacred symbol. It was dearer to him than home, or country, or friends. He listened to the other crushing tidings with calm magnanimity. But "the ark of God taken!" he cannot survive such a blow as this!

Have the fortunes,—the welfare of the Church of Christ,—any such corresponding interest to us? Do we *live* for it? Could we, like Eli, *die* for it? Alas! alas! where is the picture among us of Christians sitting on the wayside of life, trembling for the Ark of God? See them by hundreds and thousands sitting trembling for their business; for the worldly good of their families; for their money; for the golden chest of mammon! See ten thousand swords ready to start from their scabbards for the defence of hearth and home, and the protection of civil privileges and national honour. But where is there a corresponding trembling apprehension about the war of principles, though the spiritual enemy be coming in like a flood,—a rampant infidelity at our doors, and the masses of our people in crowded cities perishing for lack of knowledge! Let us take care that we be not traitors to our great trust as custodiers of the ark, the great centre of light for a dark world. The era of Scripture history, and the subsequent annals of the Church, give us significant warning that it is a possible thing for the disaster of Ebenezer to be repeated; for the ark to fall; for the candlestick to be removed! After this sad day of old Eli's death, the ark of Israel never again returned to Shiloh. Shiloh became a desolation. Its very walls were buried. Travellers to this day tell us that it is the most "featureless" place in the Holy Land. Its site can be identified no more. The ark was car-

ried from place to place for a hundred years, till it rested on Mount Zion, and even there too, the "Ichabod" pronounced on this fatal day is now written. Zion is desolate as Shiloh; according to God's own words, "*I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse!*"* And the same mournful tale was uttered, generations afterwards, amid the bleak ruins of the favoured churches of Asia. They forgot their first love; their light was quenched in darkness; the rejected Ark had to seek kindlier shores.

If for three centuries it has dwelt in our island home, let us remember that we too, like the churches before us, enjoy it on sufferance. God seems to say to us, as to Jerusalem, "*Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set up my name at the first, and see what I did to it.*" If we neglect His ark, or desecrate it, or leave it in unhallowed hands, God will give it in custody to others. He will never want *some* people or *some* nation to glorify Him and hallow His name;—"If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."† It might, indeed, on that eventful day at Shiloh's gate, have been little to Eli whether the ark returned or no. His course was run, his sun about to set. And it may, in a selfish point of view, be little to us, the waxing and waning fortunes of the Church of Christ. We may be in our graves before the Philistines—the powers of evil—muster for the last conflict. But shall we have no thought for those who come after us? Shall we estimate so lightly the prodigal blood of a martyred ancestry who died in defence of the Ark of God? Shall we count it no sacred heirloom to hand down undesecrated to

* Jer. xxvi. 6.

† Luke xix. 40.

our children's children? Let us not be mistaken. We make no allusion to championship for sect or church. See that ye do not in this respect commit the very sin of Israel in Ebenezer, when the wild and frantic shout rang through the valley as they saw the ark approaching. They gazed upon it with superstitious veneration ;—they put the symbol in place of God. How many do so still, whose cry is, "*The temple of the Lord ! the temple of the Lord !*" who are lord in some Shibeoleth of party,—guilty of the basest idolatry of man,—looking to priest, or sacrament, or holy place, instead of to Him "who sitteth between the cherubims." Go ! love the Church of God ; fight for it ; weep for it ; if you will, die for it ; but do so because you love Him who "loved that Church and gave Himself for it," and because you desire to glorify His name. The Ark of God is now in the battle-field. Enemies without receive encouragement from traitors within. Many an old saint with bent form is sitting weeping and trembling at the gates of Israel. When does the mother feel most anxious for her child? It is when she knows it is girdled with fire in the burning house, or far out in the tiny skiff in the midst of a roaring sea ; and if God is now bringing His Church "through fire and through water," causing it to ride amid the surging sea of the nations abroad, or amid elements charged with destruction at home ;—let others make their political calculations, and forecast the destinies of kingdoms, but be it yours to "seat yourselves by the way-side," and, "trembling for the ark of God," to raise the prayer amid the gathering storm, "*Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered.*"

V.

Sunset on Ramah.

“Behold a patriarch of years, who leaneth on the staff of religion;
His heart is fresh—quick to feel—a bursting fount of generosity;
Lofty aspirations, deep affections, holy hopes, are his delight.
Passionate thirst for gain never hath burnt within his bosom;
The leaden chains of that dull lust have not bound him prisoner.
The shrewd world laughed at him for honesty—the vain world mouthed
at him for honour;
The false world hated him for truth—the cold world despised him for
affection;
Still he kept his treasure—the warm and noble heart.”

—*Proverbial Philosophy.*

“How quiet shews the woodland scene!
Each flow’r and tree, its duty done,
Reposing in decay serene,
Like weary men when age is won;
Such calm old age as conscience pure
And self-commanding hearts insure,
Waiting their summons to the sky,
Content to live, but not afraid to die.”

—*Christian Year.*

“And SAMUEL died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah.”—**I SAM. xxv. 1.**

SUNSET ON RAMAH.

WHAT a gathering of mourners is this!—thousands upon thousands—for it is “all Israel” that are assembled to do honour to the deceased prophet. We found, at the death of Abraham only two sorrowing survivors named as having been present—Isaac and Ishmael. Here we have a mighty nation congregated around the bier of SAMUEL at Ramah.

His must have been no ordinary “departed worth.” There must have been some more than usually rare combination of goodness and greatness which gathered together, in a village-city of Benjamin, so vast a concourse.

Come, let us join the saddened throng ;—and, as the wail of the mourners wakes the echoes of the hills around, let us inquire what it was that made the name of Samuel so revered ;—what so embalmed this prophet and judge in the affections and memories of Israel ;—what the secret of his greatness in life, and of the universal lamentation at his death and burial.

The First element in his character we shall notice is *Kindness of heart* ; this was accompanied with the kindred virtues of *generosity, unselfishness, and delicate consideration for the feelings of others.*

We could almost have inferred this genial beneficence of spirit in Samuel, independent of any specific instances in his history, from the mere fact of old Eli’s affection being drawn

out so early and so strongly towards him. There could be (we are naturally led to think) but little affinity or sympathy between this old man and this mere child. Eli! the most illustrious name in Israel,—God's high priest, the chief magistrate of the nation—combining the regal and sacerdotal functions,—gathering around him, from his position, all the great and wise and good. Yet see how he clings to that child at Shiloh. No father ever loved his offspring more tenderly than did that old half-blind patriarch and priest the little boy wearing the linen ephod, and whose couch was in the chamber adjoining his own. Indeed, ever since that father's eyes had been opened to the reckless and profligate conduct of his own sons, he seems to have turned his broken heart towards this devoted youth; and nothing, in all the Bible's pictures of human love, is more affecting than the tender attachment that sprang up between them. It was old Winter, with furrowed brow and hoary locks, and tottering step, clasping Spring with its buds and blossoms. It was the Alpine glacier nestling the tiny floweret in its snowy bosom; or in some deep crevice, screening it from the blast. It was the old gnarled cedar bending its top bough to the sapling that had taken shelter under its shadow. See how youth and age love one another!

This remarkable kindness of the old man was so far, doubtless, disinterested—the offspring of a naturally easy and confiding nature; but it must have arisen, too, from idiosyncrasy. There *must* have been loving and endearing qualities in that young heart which converted the boy into the confidential friend.

Take one instance, one illustrative trait of this kindness,

or rather, considerate delicacy of feeling, from the opening chapter of the prophet's history.

"*The word of God,*" we read, "*was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*" That is to say, the old prophetic communications—the miraculous appearances and divine interventions had been long suspended:—it was a comparatively rare thing for a divine utterance to be heard. Yet, on a memorable night, when Samuel had laid himself down to sleep—when the lamp was dimly flickering in the temple—a mysterious voice sounded in his ear,—"*The Lord called Samuel!*"*

Favoured child! to be the first, after a long interval of silence, to listen to the lively oracle. The message, indeed, was a sad one;—"not a joyous chime, but a funeral knell." It would "make the ear of every one that heard it to tingle."† But yet, sad and direful as it was, and tenfold more so to the unconscious parent hard by,—how few at such an age, elated with the signal honour, could have resisted the impulse to go at once and make it known. Unthinking childhood, from the very love of communicating what is startling, marvellous, or strange, often unwittingly wounds and lacerates;—making public the tale of sadness which a maturer judgment would see it befitting to suppress. But mark Samuel's kind consideration for the old father's feelings. He dreads to disclose the terrible secret. Locking it in his bosom, he lies till morning on his sleepless couch; and when morning comes—the wonted hour for duty—wearing as joyous a countenance as he can, he resumes his ordinary work. It is not until Eli (guessing perhaps too faithfully the burden of the vision)

* 1 Sam. iii. 1, 4.

† 1 Sam. iii. 11.

urges his young attendant to make the disclosure, that Samuel, with misgiving heart, reveals what dare no longer be concealed. If a less tender affection had subsisted between them, Eli might have indignantly spurned the message and the messenger. What! a child the rebuker of age! a child the prophet of evil,—the bearer of tales of horror to God's High Priest! But he has watched and appreciated his kind consideration. He knows too well the tenderness of that little heart, and in reply he pours into the child's ears nothing but words of sublime resignation: "*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good!*"

Or shall we go to the end of his life for an illustration of that same unselfish kindness, the disinterested generosity of a noble nature? It was after a long period of unflinching devotion to the interests of the commonwealth, that Samuel one day, in his house at Ramah, was waited on by the heads of the tribes. In their mad love of change, they demanded the introduction of a regal government. The prophet heard them in silence. He was not wounded, as he might have been, by any apparent slight of his own services; but too well he foresaw the consequences of this reckless disregard of the principles on which their nation was established by God himself. If he had been like many, he would have resented the affront. Stung to the quick by their ingratitude and dissatisfaction with his rule, he might at once have flung aside the reins of government. Driven from the helm, he might have allowed the ship to drift hopelessly among the breakers, saying, "Well, take your mind; you have sown to the wind, I leave you to reap the whirlwind."

What is his conduct? With a beautiful abnegation of self; without one spark of envy, or jealousy, or wounded pride,—consulting only the well-being of his country,—he does that for which generations unborn had reason to bless his memory. He tells them, indeed, with the plain outspoken candour of an honest man, that they had committed a great political blunder. Nay, further, he expostulates and remonstrates. But when all is in vain,—when he gets in reply the dogged answer,—“*Nay, but we will have a king over us, that he may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles;*”—then this noble pilot, that had weathered the political storms for twenty years, will not desert his post until he has done his best to equip the vessel afresh. He shapes for them their new form of regal government, and does what he can, probably to modify the insolence of oriental kingly rule. Farther, we see him and his political successor, at their first meeting at Ramah, seated side by side at a banquet, then walking together on the top of Samuel’s flat-roofed house—the Judge initiating the elect King into the duties and responsibilities of his momentous destiny. And when he pours the consecrated oil on Saul’s head, and by this act consummated his own deposition and the elevation of the young Benjamite, it was accompanied, not with the frown of envy, but the kiss of friendship, the token of good success. He cheerfully steps down himself from the pinnacle of power, and is the first of the Hebrew nation to utter the loyal prayer, “*God save THE KING!*” It reminds us of the generosity shewn by Jonathan a few years afterwards, when, as lawful heir to the throne, he willingly waives his princely prerogative, saying

to him whom the world would have called his "rival," but whom he loved as his friend,—"*Thou shalt be king, and I shall be next to thee.*"

Let us imitate this kindness, this disinterestedness, this unselfish love in another's welfare, even where our own interests may suffer. Ah! what magic there is in *kindness*. How many a little Samuel in a household has smoothed the brow of wrinkled age, and erased the channel of hot tears. How many a morose and moody spirit has had cheerfulness imparted by the light, buoyant step, the sunny countenance, and the little, thoughtful act of unostentatious attention! It is an easy and inexpensive way of doing much. Kindness is not measured or expounded by great deeds, by princely gifts, largesses, extravagant and showy acts of beneficence. It is often best manifested in little ways;—in the visit to the sick;—the mindful interest shewn in the wasted invalid; the clothing or schooling of the orphan; readiness, as in the case of Samuel, to minister to the aged. Remember the apostolic injunction, "*Be ye kind one to another.*" "*Let all your things be done with charity or kindness.*" "*The cup of cold water given to a disciple will not lose its reward.*"

Another trait in the character of Samuel was *Firmness*.

We often find in great men a remarkable union of opposite qualities. This was eminently the case with Samuel, who combined the gentleness of the lamb with the boldness of the lion. He suggests, in more than one passage of his history, the composite character of Luther;—at one time, the centre of a peaceful domestic picture in the bosom of his family, doting with unwonted fondness and tenderness on

the one little daughter that was early taken from him ;—at another, displaying the dauntless hero-spirit which never failed him in his great life-struggle.

Samuel's was no child's work, in the era of Hebrew history in which his lot was cast. During the first twenty years of his public life, the people had fallen into a humiliating state of vassalage under the iron yoke of Philistia. The Philistines had not actually taken possession of the country, but they had so garrisoned all the border-towns, that they were enabled to overawe the entire land, and exact exorbitant tribute. And what intensified this patriot's sorrows was, that the worship of Dagon had in many places been introduced; idolatry in its worst form had been corrupting the purity of the ancient faith. The lamp of the Lord in the temple was, in a figurative sense, "waxing dim"—the patriot spirit was low—the tribes had been broken up into separate petty republics, with few elements of cohesion. For these twenty years, this bold champion ceased not to exhort and to expostulate ;—rousing the apathetic to a sense of their guilt and danger, and vindicating the name and worship of the great God whose servant he was. Great in this respect was the contrast with his revered father, Eli, whose fatal blemish was an easy flexibility of temper; seen first in the insubordination of his own family, and more fatally manifested in the feeble way in which he grasped the helm of government. This pusillanimous conduct—this "fear of man which bringeth a snare," had no place in the character or administration of Samuel. His first magisterial act at the close of these twenty years of political servitude, was to issue a public *manifesto* on the guilt of idolatry—to quench the fire of these defiled

altars—to hurl Baalim and Ashtaroth from their seats, and re-establish the national faith. He was no warrior—he was not bred to arms. We look in him for no feats of chivalry—no bold marches and surprises such as we read of in the life of Joshua. Perhaps this was the main reason for the Israelites afterwards desiring a king; that they wished one with more of a soldier look, and mien, and training. But though no soldier by name, the true warrior-spirit lurked under the lowly and unmartial attire of the prophet of Ramah. See how that spirit rose with the occasion, when he assembled, at this same period of his history, all the tribes at *Mizpeh*. The scene itself must have been a striking one. Though the position of *Mizpeh* has not positively been ascertained, there is the strongest reason to identify it with the well-known eminence called "*Nebi-Samuel*," so conspicuous in the northern view from Jerusalem.* It is the highest eminence in the landscape, and was peculiarly fitted as a rendezvous for the surrounding tribes.

The thousands of Israel have mustered at the bidding of their great head! The tidings are carried through the ranks, that the lords of Philistia are advancing; a panic spreads through the host of the Hebrews;—they are taken at unawares, and are all unprepared for conflict. Left to themselves, they must either abandon their camp in inglorious flight, and their city and adjacent villages to merciless pillage, or else submit to the humiliating alternative of unconditional sur-

* It is the hill on whose summit our own king, Richard, buried his face in his armour, and exclaimed, "Ah, Lord God, I pray that I may never see Thy holy city, if so be that I may not rescue it from the hands of thine enemies."—See Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 213.

render. It was a moment requiring promptitude, courage, decision. But Samuel was equal to the emergency. It is to his brave conduct, his calm fortitude on this occasion, (to which we shall have cause afterwards to revert,) that the inspired apostle refers. In his illustrations of faith, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, among other ancient worthies, of whom he says, "time would fail him to tell,"—he specially includes *Samuel*, "*who escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness was made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armics of the aliens.*"

Take one other example.

Look at his bold and manly bearing on the occasion of summoning the same tribes at Gilgal, to ratify their own choice of a king, and publicly inaugurate him in his regal functions. Saul had just returned, covered with martial glory, from his first successful campaign against the Ammonites. He is the idol of the hour. The camp had rung with loyal acclamations; and had Samuel wished to ingratiate himself at that moment of elation, alike with monarch and people, he would have kept silence, and allowed the vast assembly to disperse, with no utterance of rebuke or warning to mar their rejoicings. But this moral hero must, on this the occasion of his last public appearance, deliver a faithful and earnest reproof for their wickedness and apostasy. Though the monarch's crown is glittering before his eyes, and the wreath of victory on his brow, the old prophet does not scruple thus to address the people in hearing of their sovereign: "*If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king!*" With his wrinkled hands uplifted to heaven, his warning is divinely ratified by thunder

and rain ; and that, too, at the unwonted time of wheat-harvest, when neither thunder nor rain is known in Palestine. We are told that "*the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.*"*

Alas! the monarch *does* fail to fulfil his covenanted obligations—adding hypocrisy to a dereliction of duty in his conduct regarding Amalek. The bold reprover of his wrongs is once more at his side, telling that the penalty of disobedience is the forfeiture of his crown,—demanding, "*What meaneth this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*" † Ay, even after the old prophet is laid in his ancestral grave at Ramah, the affrighted king bribes the enchantress of Endor to summon up his shade—knowing that from those lips that never shrunk from duty, nor trembled with coward concealment, he will get, at all events, the terrible truth.

Nothing is so much the attribute of a noble mind as strength of purpose—moral fortitude. True, there is a point where firmness lapses into its counterfeit of wilfulness,—where strength of principle is confounded with obstinacy. Nor must we mistake for boldness and fortitude, rash impulse and blind fervour. Saul himself was, in this worst sense, a man of boldness and firmness ; exhibiting at times flashes of kindness and generosity, along with vindictive temper, intense selfishness, impatience of restraint, fiery passion, and cruel revenge. He had much of the soldier spirit as well as the soldier look. But, as has been well observed, "the firmness required in a great moral or political crisis and

* 1 Sam. xii. 18.

† 1 Sam. xv. 22.

exigency, is not to be confounded with a panoply of steel." Moral courage is the greatest of all. Be it ours to aspire after this fortitude—"Add to your *faith*," says the apostle, "*fortitude!*" It is the fortitude of Daniel, the prime minister of Babylon, standing in a heathen court and maintaining a resolute and uncompromising fidelity to the faith of his fathers. It is the fortitude of the saints in Nero's household, "rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," but all subordinate to "rendering to God the things that are God's." It is the fortitude of the merchant, upholding his Christian integrity and commercial honour amid temptations to fraud and prevailing dereliction of principle. It is the fortitude of youth, amid the snares of a vast city and the jeers of scoffing companions—hallowing the remembrance of a father's counsels and a mother's prayers, and the voice of One greater still;—able to say with unabashed countenance, and to act out the saying,—"*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth.*"*

A third element in the character of Samuel was his *Integrity*.

He was, in every action of his life, the true patriot. He had but one end in view—to uphold his country's honour—to defend it from foreign invasion and intestine feuds. He loved his country more than himself. Well might Saul's servant, as they were approaching the gates of Ramah, in search of their stray asses, say, "*Behold, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man.*"†

* Rom. i. 15.

† 1 Sam. ix. 6.

His unworthy sons, so strangely unlike the noble example set them from their youth, seem to have been displeased that he had not been less scrupulous. Of them it is said, "*They took bribes, and perverted justice.*" Never was there one so guiltless of ambition for family aggrandisement. Hear his great address on the heights of Gilgal, where he had assembled the tribes for Saul's public inauguration as king, "*I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed; whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind my eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.*"* It was a glorious testimony to the justice of this appeal, when the shout of an assembled nation echoed back, "*Thou hast not defrauded us, or oppressed us.*"

Can we, each of us, say the same? Can we stand up before high heaven, whatever our situation, or circumstances, or profession, and say with an honest heart, "These hands are clean! I have never defrauded my neighbour, or wounded his character, or sought to exalt my own on the ruins or at the expense of his? I have never stooped to do an underhand deed, or be a party to a clandestine transaction that cannot stand the light of day? I may be in humble circumstances;—wealth, or position, or influence I may have none. I may be poor, the victim of designing men; but, thank God, I have 'a good conscience.' This volume of my inner life corresponds with the outer. Every leaf may be read; find the blot if you can."

* 1 Sam. xii. 3.

There *are* volumes in this world's strange library which have their splendid exteriors—a binding gilt and embossed;—but on opening them, they are tattered and worm-eaten; they cannot bear inspection; they are to be looked at, not examined. When opened, they fall to pieces, like the dust in the mummy-case! Oh, rather have the outside cover poor—the binding tattered—than the leaves soiled with mercantile depravity and villain fraud; rather the scanty meal and the frugal dwelling, than the banquet with its every piece of plate shewing the reflected face of a hungry creditor, and the music jarred with the whimpering cry of the defrauded orphan!

If there be a character which we would, more than another,—like the enchantress at the cave at Endor—conjure up from the invisible world, as a grand pattern for the times, it is this great Aristides* of the Hebrew Commonwealth,—this venerable impersonation of old-world honour and integrity. Would none cower in guilty shame at his apparition? Would no knees tremble if the shade appeared in the shop, the warehouse, the market-place, the exchange? We have plenty of Sauls now-a-days;—men of *brave* heart, and fiery impulse, and warrior-spirit, all ready with the greaves of brass and spear of iron. We need more of the Samuels; who, with the moral armour of probity and honour, will save their country from a sadder invasion than that of sword and bayonet, and from a more humiliating and debasing ruin.

Avoid—and young men especially—avoid all base, servile, underhand, sneaking ways. Part with anything sooner than

* Called so by Grotius.

your integrity and “conscious rectitude;” flee from injustice as you would from a viper’s fangs; avoid a lie as you would the gates of hell. Some there are who are callous as to this. Some there are who, in stooping to mercantile dishonour and baseness, in driving the immoral bargain, think they have done a clever action. Things are often called by their wrong names—duplicity is called shrewdness, and wrongheartedness is called longheadedness, evil is called good, and good evil, and darkness is put for light, and light for darkness. Well! be it so. You may be prosperous in your own eyes; you may have realised an envied fortune; you may have your carriage, and plate, and servants, and pageantry; but rather the shieling and the crust of bread with a good conscience, than the stately dwelling or palace without it. Rather than the marble mausoleum, which gilds and smothers tales of heartless villainy and fraud—rather, far rather, that lowly heap of grass we were wont often to gaze upon in an old village churchyard, with the simple stone that bore record of a cottar’s virtues, “*Here lies an honest man!*”

There is nothing more sad than to be carried like a vessel away from the straight course of principle; to be left a stranded outcast thing on the sands of dishonour. There is nothing more pitiable than to behold a man bolstering himself up in a position he is not entitled to. “That is a man of *capital*,” say the world, pointing to an unscrupulous and successful swindler. Capital! What is capital? Is it what a man *has*? Is it counted by pounds and pence, stocks and shares, by houses and lands? No! capital is not what a man *has*, but what a man *is*. Character is capital; honour is

capital ; the world's wretched version sometimes is, "*the man makes his worth*,"—"makes" it,—they care not how—overriding others, cheating others, clever and successful roguery. But the old proverb of the good old times condemns the counterfeit, tosses the base coin aside, and proclaims, "*worth makes the man*." Angels, as they look down at times on our streets, say, as they point to some one walking there, "That man is *ruined* !" Ruined ! what has ruined him ? Do they see him in tattered attire, with shabby dress, the ticket on his house, or the shutter on his place of business ? Was he once a prosperous man—a credited millionaire ? but the sand-built castles have become the sport of the tide, his wife and family beggared ? No ; he has all that ;—town and country house, equipages standing at his door, lights of luxury gleaming in his windows. *Ruined* ! then how is this ? Ah, his *character* is gone, his integrity is sold ; he has bartered honour for a miserable mess of earthly pottage. He is put on the bankrupt-list by all the truly great in the ranks of lofty being. God save us from ruin like this ! Perish what may ;—perish gold, silver, houses, lands ; let the winds of misfortune dash our vessel on the sunken rock, but let *integrity* be like the valued keepsake the sailor-boy lashed with the rope round his body, the only thing we care to save. Let me die ; but let angels read, if friends cannot afford to erect the gravestone, "*Here lies an honest man* !"

Another and crowning element of Samuel's character was his *Piety*.

We have been speaking hitherto only of the virtues of

native growth—those which made him *the man*. We speak of him now as the “*man of God*”—the Saint—the Minister of heaven.

Piety, like a silver thread, runs through the tissue, (the warp and woof) of his every-day life, from its earliest commencement. He had been baptized by the prayers of a godly mother. Better far than that little coat, (the little linen ephod which she made him and brought year by year as her offering of love), were those childhood lessons with which faith and piety clothed his infant spirit. Instead of being, as many a youth is, launched at tender years on the wide world,—sent out to buffet a sea of temptation,—she had the joy of taking him up to be placed under the influences of an aged saint of God. For twenty years of his early life there is a blank in his history. One single entry is all the historian gives us, but it is significant and suggestive: “*And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him.*” We meet him at his own city of Ramah, but, like Abraham, he has “built an altar to the Lord.” He was emphatically a man of *prayer*. On a great emergency when even his sagacious and well-balanced mind was greatly perplexed to know the path of duty—afraid perhaps that personal feeling mingled with his displeasure—we read, “*the thing displeased Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord.*” It was the befitting time for prayer. How often do we go to our knees with difficulties prejudged;—hard questions we pretend to ask God to solve, but which our own poor judgments have solved already. Samuel gives us the definition of prayer;—it is a cry to God in straits;—a groping for direction not from sparks of our own kindling, but from the great Fountain of Light.

In God's name and strength he embarked in all his enterprises—" *Elimelech* " (my God is king) seemed to be his life motto ; and it was the denial of this by the people, the rejection of God's regal prerogative, and the substitution of the earthly kingship, which roused him more than once to honest indignation. The boldness he displayed at that striking convocation at Mizpeh, was all inspired by Religion. It was his own pious reverential spirit that gathered together the vast assemblage. He convened the tribes, that he might inaugurate his own rule and government by *prayer and solemn fasting*. The people, at his bidding, bring buckets of water from a neighbouring fountain, and pour them on the ground, in token alike of their denunciation of idolatry, and in confirmation of the national oath. And, when the shout of the Philistines is heard, and their gleaming array is seen in the distance, see how Samuel comforts himself! "No time now," some would say, "for religious duties. Why tarry by that altar? Why linger by the bleating cries of that 'sucking lamb?' when the ranks should be forming, and the arrow on the bow-string?" "*Some trust in chariots,*" is the spirit of Samuel's war-song, "*and some in horses,*" but "*we will remember the name of the Lord our God.*" As the theocratic viceroy in that hour of imminent peril, he stands between the living and the dead! See him, calm and undismayed, behind the smoke of his sacrifice, his hands raised to heaven, until he sees these blue skies melting into allies. The clouds (nature's chariots and horsemen) mustering to battle. It is enough,—God answered him in peals of thunder. "*The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice hailstones and coals of fire!*" Not a sword

was unsheathed—not a bow was bent—not a spear hurled. These thunders and lightning-arrows from the quiver of God, did the work of discomfiture. They had only to “*Stand still and see His salvation.*” The Philistines fled, and Israel pursued them with great slaughter to Bethcar. And when the pursuit is over, and the trumpet musters its victorious squadrons, the first act of the prophet-conqueror is to give the glory to whom the glory alone is due. He set up a great stone, and wrote upon it “*Ebenezer,*” “*the Lord hath helped us!*”

Let Samuel’s piety be ours. That manly piety,—the happy cultivation and combination of the active and passive virtues,—the blending of the inner with the outer life ;—not a negative saintship, like that of the men of Meroz, but the harmonious intermingling of diligence in business, with fervour in spirit “*serving the Lord.*” The true type of “the Man”—the ideal of the Christian—is simplicity of faith and activity in duty. Samuel was kind in heart, strong in faith, and pure in spirit—but all was crowned and beautified by giving glory to God. The true Christian is not like the pyramid, with its naked sides, and tiers of monotonous stone ; but rather like the Alp,—its majestic slopes feathered and studded with forest and cave, shady rock and limpid stream ; where the chamois may bound, and the bird may nestle, and the fox-glove hang its bells, and the weary pilgrim rest and slake his thirst :—whilst its diadem of snow, glorifying all, is bathed in the cloudless azure of heaven.

We have thus endeavoured to stand in the midst of that dense crowd which followed the prophet to his earthly rest-

ing-place at Ramah, and taken a brief retrospect of his life and character; tracing the sun from its earliest rising on Mount Ephraim and Shiloh, on through the clouded political firmament, to its setting in Ramah of Benjamin. The latter portion of his life was spent in apparent seclusion. He retired from his public work. But to the last, he was the devoted patriot. Saul was the *ostensible* sovereign, but he the real ruler. Saul, in the eyes of the electing tribes, may have had the *right*, but even they seemed to assign to the old prophet the *might*—for we read, “*He judged Israel all the days of his life.*”*

His closing years could not fail to be years of sorrow. Not only had his own children failed to profit by the example of his lofty principle and exalted piety, but he saw the sceptre dishonoured in the tyrant’s hand, and him, on whose head he had poured the anointing oil, proving sadly untrue to his great mission.

There must, however, have been gleams of hope and comfort, too, amid the anarchy and confusion of the present. That consecrating oil had been poured also on a shepherd-boy in Bethlehem, now the unmerited victim of Saul’s worst passions. With prophetic foresight, the closing hours of the old Seer and Judge may have been gladdened by assurances of a great national revival under “the man after God’s own heart.” Ay, the vision of a mightier than David may have risen up before him in the dim future—that of “a King” who was to “reign in righteousness;” who was to pour His blessing not on the tribes of Israel only, but on “all the families of the earth,”—“*the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning*

* 1 Sam. vii. 15.

star!” As to how he fell asleep,—his closing moments, his dying words and benedictions,—we know nothing. Nothing is recorded. But this we *do* know, that his influence and life, in its best sense, perished not with him in the grave of Ramah;—its pulses beat in the nation’s heart for generations afterwards. It might be averred of him, as was afterwards said of a nobler Prophet, that he was “*set for the rising of many in Israel.*” *

“Samuel died,” we here read, “and all the Israelites were gathered together and lamented him.” Nay, in one sense, weep not! lament not! He is not dead, but liveth! Let the prophet’s ashes repose in peace. We need not go with Saul to the cave at Endor, to utter incantations, that we may see his shape, and listen to his burning words. His deeds are living, imperishable realities. His voice is even now heard. He is enrolled in the Bible’s high genealogies,—canonized in the noblest sense with the great and the good of all time—“*Moses and Aaron among his priests, and SAMUEL among them that call upon his name!*” †

* Luke ii. 34.

† Ps. xcix. 6.

VI.

Sunset on the Mountains of Gilead.

“ This world is all a fleeting show,
 For man’s illusion given;
 The smiles of joy, the tears of woe,
 Deceitful shine, deceitful flow—
 There’s nothing true but heaven.

“ And false the light on glory’s plume
 As fading hues of even;
 And love, and hope, and beauty’s bloom,
 Are blossoms gather’d for the tomb—
 There’s nothing bright but heaven.

“ Poor wanderers of a stormy day,
 From wave to wave we’re driven;
 And fancy’s flash, and reason’s ray,
 Serve but to light the troubled way—
 There’s nothing calm but heaven.”

—MOORE.

“ **And BARZILLAI THE GILEADITE** came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man. And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king? and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father, and of my mother. And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him.”—2 **SAM.** xix. 31-37, 39.

SUNSET ON THE MOUNTAINS OF GILEAD.

HERE is a noble sunset on the border hills of Palestine.

We do not, indeed, see the sun vanishing behind the mountain-tops ; it is rather the flush of crimson before the setting. We are not called around the death-couch of BARZILLAI ; but his words all speak of approaching departure. He knows that the sand-glass is hastening to its last grain ; and, in the prospect of a speedy exodus from the house of his earthly pilgrimage, he summons us to hear his simple but significant discourse on the philosophy of life.

We have only this brief glimpse in his biography. He comes before us,—the Melchisedek of his age,—to meet David, as Melchisedek had met his great ancestor, with the spoils of victory. He gives him his blessing, and then vanishes from the scene. But enough is recorded, to make us admire and love him ; and though living in an age of lesser light and fewer privileges than ours, there is much in his character which we shall do well to imitate.

We shall endeavour, with God's blessing, to draw one or two lessons from the character of Barzillai suggested in the interesting Bible narrative.

Let us first observe, his *pity for the fallen*.

It is a beautiful picture to see this old chieftain, when he hears of David's sudden humiliation, hastening to the place of exile, to offer him his generous sympathy, along with sub-

stantial gifts for his exhausted followers. In concert with other two chiefs of the Trans-Jordanic region, hearing that "*the people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness,*" they bring with them, as presents, the fruits of their pastoral domains—"wheat, barley, and flour, and parched corn; honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine."* Barzillai seems to have been a wealthy proprietor or chief in Gilead—a petty prince among the mountaineers of Palestine, animated with a true clansman's spirit, and capable of noble and generous deeds. Even though the gifts had been less valuable and needed, they would still have evinced a spirit of generous sympathy and commiseration for the fallen. The scene in these highlands of Gilead, where the interest centres on a dethroned monarch, forcibly reminds us of the same generous impulse which, more than a hundred years ago, in our own Scotland, stirred many a Highland heart: when one, in whose veins the blood of kings flowed, was a homeless wanderer among her moors and mountains. Many who had no sympathy for his cause commiserated his fate. They forgot the crimes of his house in his personal misfortunes; they knew that he had seen *better times*—that he had once walked in royal halls; and cave, and cottage, and turf-sheiling, were freely tendered to shelter his defenceless head.

This pity for the unfortunate is one of the finest traits in our human nature. Would that it were a universal one! But the world is not always so lavish of its pity. It finds it easier and more profitable to fawn on the prosperous,—to flatter the great,—to give to those from whom it may hope

* 2 Sam. xvii. 29.

again to receive. How many, (so long as you are in affluent circumstances,) will be seen in your company; visitors at your house, guests at your table. But if the gifts of capricious fortune take wings and flee away—if (with no stain on your honour, or blot on your character,) the bleak winds of misfortune have scattered your hopes in the bud, and made havoc and ruin of your capital;—then such friends as these can afford to forget you; no time, as formerly, for a talk on the street, or a friendly call in passing;—a forced, galvanic smile takes the place of the old familiar one. These are summer friends; out, like the butterfly, on the day of sunshine; away, we know not where, when the sky is cloudy and lowering. Ah! there is nothing—(I speak in the case of reverses for which you are not morally responsible)—there is nothing so mean and dastardly as this. Unkindness and resentment, under any circumstances, are indefensible; but to trample on a *fallen* foe—to crush the powerless—to visit them with coldness and unkindness at the very moment when they most need their aching wounds bound up—this is cruel indeed!

On the other hand, how noble is the example of Barzillai, and such as he, who love to come with words and deeds of kindness in the hour of bitter reverse and altered fortune. He had often, doubtless, admired David in his greatness; alike as the warrior, the king, and the saint; and being, like himself, “an old man, and full of years,” he would all the more commiserate him when sent forth to buffet this pitiless storm. If he can do no more, he will hasten across the mountain-passes, to offer the tribute of his sympathy to the crownless king; and, in accordance with oriental

wont and munificence, take with him the produce of his rich meadows.

Be it ours to imitate the spirit of this Gilead chief, and never to be guilty of the dastard act of trampling on an humbled foe. In commercial communities especially, where money is the standard of everything, and where the man in the ceiled house to-day, may be in the humble lodging in a few months, there is a greater temptation to treat misfortune with unkind severity; to be all familiarity and courtesy to king David in the Jerusalem palace, but to be all superciliousness and distance to the exile at Mahanaim!

“*When thou thinkest thou standest, take heed lest thou fall.*” How does our blessed Lord rebuke, in us all, this cold, hardened, heartless behaviour to the fallen; ay, too, even when there was *more* than misfortune. You remember that withered flower that tried, in the presence of the Infinitely Pure One, to lift its drooping head? The Pharisees (in the spirit of the world) would have crushed it in a moment. The disciples, in an equally cruel spirit, would have cast it among the wrack and weeds as outcast and polluted. But what says He whose great errand from heaven to earth was to lift the fallen, and commiserate a world of “the lost?” “*Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more!*”

As a second lesson, mark his *disinterested loyalty*.

Expediency! expediency! with how many is that the regulating, governing principle of their lives!—not what is *right*—but what is *prudent*. Such are they who sail with wind and tide—in politics, in religion, in commerce, in daily society and friendship. They will take the winning side.

They are what the world call *far-seeing men*. They look before them. They make a careful calculation of consequences; and are not very scrupulous as to principle.

How did right and might—principle and expediency—stand to one another at this juncture of Hebrew history? Absalom had stolen the hearts of Israel. By consummate art, or rather by unprincipled princerecraft, he had undermined his father's throne, sown disaffection among the people; and, in short, with everything to favour him, in youth, attractiveness, pomp, and display, (all powerful qualities with the oriental mind,) he had seized the Hebrew sceptre. According to human calculations, his aged father's case might be deemed desperate. He had crossed Jordan, in all probability, to his grave; and the risk old Barzillai incurred, in fraternising with the outlawed king, was a serious one. What if Absalom and his army, in the flush of triumph, cross Jordan, and cut to pieces David's panic-stricken force? Woe to the aged clansman of Gilead who has dared to shew him kindness. His hoar head will be hung a trophy on the gate of Mahanaim! And Barzillai must have weighed all these consequences. By becoming confederate with David—sending these camel-loads of butter and honey and cheese, and these bushels of corn,—he made himself a marked man. His fertile fields at Rogelim, will be swept by the army of the usurper. He and his, will be the first to feel Absalom's revenge.

But how does he act? He will do what is *right*, and leave the results in a Higher hand. Though with fearful odds against him, he will cling to injured goodness, and assert the majesty of truth over baseness and wrong. What cared he

for those hollow acclaims that rose on the other side of Jordan, welcoming a villain to a throne to which he had climbed over the grey hairs of an honoured father. No; though he should stand alone, he will execrate the deed. Though it should cost him his lands, his flocks, his patrimonial inheritance, he will cast in his lot with dishonoured and deeply-injured virtue, rather than with a successful but unprincipled traitor.

Had Barzillai made it a question of *expediency*, he would either have preserved his neutrality, not mixing himself up with the quarrel at all, but remaining in quiet possession of his flocks and inheritance in the south; or else he might have lent the weight of his influence to the popular side, "*for the conspiracy,*" we read, "*was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.*"* Had he been a mercenary adventurer, by becoming confederate with the victorious army, and cutting off the supplies from the camp of David, he would have decided the fortunes of the day.

How differently does he act! He never hesitates. Whatever might be the result, he knows who has the *right*; and hastens to the expatriated king with acceptable supplies of the best he has; ay, and with what to a wounded spirit was better than all the balm of Gillead or the flocks of its mountains, he carries his own sympathy and manifested pity for fallen greatness.

And then, see the sequel of the history. When all was over;—when a Greater than any earthly might had scattered the alien armies and laid low the usurper, and the venerable monarch was on his triumphal march back to his throne, the

* 2 Sam. xv. 12.

old Gileadite chief came down once more from his fastnesses with a body of retainers, to do homage to the King and give him his patriot welcome and blessing. Nor was David forgetful of the disinterested loyalty so lately manifested. In a spirit of equally noble generosity and gratitude, he urged Barzillai to join the triumphal cavalcade, to come and have a home in his palace in Jerusalem, and a place and seat at his royal table.

But he will take no reward or recompence, although what millions are spending a lifetime to achieve was within the grasp of this border Sheik. Up the steep hill of fame, few reach more than half-way; fewer still ever gain the summit. But here was one to whom was offered the hand of friendship by the greatest king of the age, and apartments in the palace of Zion. Thousands would have coveted the honour. His name would have been on every tongue as a favoured old man, the envy of all his brother chieftains.

“But no,” says he. “It was for no such base, paltry, selfish motive I acted a patriot’s part to a patriot king. I brought not of my produce in hopes of getting in return some princely recompence. In giving in my adhesion to the cause of David, it was with no mean hope of bettering my position or aggrandising my family. Let me give and receive a blessing: that is all I want. Let me bend homeward these aged steps. My best reward—my *only* accepted reward—will be the feeling, ‘*I have done my duty.*’”

Mark, once more, as a third lesson, *his estimate of life.*

A flattering proposal had just been made to him. In the brilliant pageant that was sweeping past, he had a place of

royal and conspicuous honour in his offer. Few would have resisted the golden bribe. But he remembered that fourscore years had whitened his head. A brief time, at the best, he could still have in the world. He had outlived the age when he could enjoy its pageantries and honours. "*And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king; and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother.*" As if he had said, "Tempt me not. The day was when I might have grasped at the munificent honour. The day was when this heart would have beat with pride at the thought of being a lordly retainer of the Hebrew king—a guest at his table. But these things have lost their relish for me now. The whirl and excitement, the glitter and pageantry of a courtier's life have no charm. The festive rejoicings on the return of the king would be too much for this aged frame. '*I am this day fourscore years old.*' This head, once covered with raven locks, is now white with the snows of winter. These hands, that once dealt and parried the warrior's blow, have now tremblingly to grasp the pilgrim's staff. These limbs, that once could nimbly chase the gazelle up the craggy heights of

Gilead, now totter underneath me. These eyes, 'the windows of the house,' are beginning to be darkened; they look out on a dimmed and murky landscape; I could not see the glories of the king's palace at Jerusalem even were I there. These ears, once the inlets of enjoyment, which once loved to hear the dulcet tones of my own mountain-pipe, would listen with unavailing effort to the choristers of Zion, or to tabret and lute and harp of sweetest Hebrew minstrelsy. I should be but a poor accession to the royal table—a poor guest in the palace of Judah. Bid me not go thither! Suffer me rather to say farewell on the banks of the frontier river. Return! thou monarch, beloved of thy Lord! return to thy capital, and may the acclamations of a grateful people greet thy restoration. For myself, permit me quietly to abide in my own highland-home—these my native rugged mountains. Their sepulchres hold dust that is sacred to me. This is now my only unfulfilled wish, that *'I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother!'*”

We cannot positively pronounce on Barzillai's *piety*. The very respect and personal kindness manifested for David, “the man after God's own heart,” combined with his loyalty, disinterestedness, unselfishness, and filial devotion, would lead us to draw favourable conclusions regarding his religious character. At all events, we cannot think of him as a mere sated voluptuary, his bones full of the sin of his youth;—with debilitated frame and shattered nerve, breathing out the fretful soliloquy of a peevish old age. We would accept these words of his, rather as the apostrophe of a good and venerable old man, who takes the grand view of life as a prelude

to another, and who wishes to be tempted by nothing that would dissipate his thoughts, and unfit him for solemn preparation for his great change. "Tempt me not," he says, "with what might divert my thoughts from more solemn and urgent verities. Let me enjoy a quiet eventide before the great night-journey! Let me go and set my house in order before I die!"

And it is to this we must all come!

Life is now before most of us, with its bright plans and phantom-visions;—its rainbow-hues and air-castles. Many have no eyes to see the end of that glowing perspective—the close of the avenue, which at present is overarched with the green boughs of hope. But as we go on, the distance sensibly diminishes; our consciousness becomes more and more vivid that the end is nearing; and we feel that we are passing, like the millions that have preceded us, to the "long home."

"*How long,*" said Barzillai, "*have I to live?*" "*How long have I to live?*"—what a solemn question for us all, amid the daily-occurring proofs of our frailty and mortality. Oh, what a motto to bear about with us continually amid the tear and wear of life!

Young man! with the flash of young hope in thine eye; existence extending in interminable vista before thee;—pause ever and anon on the enchanted highway, and put the solemn question, "*How long have I to live?*"

Man of business! in availing yourself of new openings in trade, accepting new responsibilities and anxieties, involving yourself in new entanglements, have you stopped at the threshold and probed yourself with the question, "*How long have I to live?*"

Child of pleasure! plunging into the midst of dissipating excitement,—the whirl of intoxicating gaiety ;—have you ever, in returning, jaded, and weary, and worn, from the heated ball-room, flung yourself prayerless on your pillow, and sunk into a feverish dream, with the question haunting you, “*How long have I to live?*”

Fruitless professor! who, with the form of godliness, art yet destitute of every practical active Christian virtue ; who hast never known what it is to relieve the needy, or succour the poor, or whisper the word of unselfish kindness, or help the languishing mission-cause. Thou who hast lived a useless life ;—who in the retrospect can point to no one good, or generous, or self-sacrificing deed. Amid abounding opportunities, perhaps with full coffers at thy side, and the bar of God before thine eyes, hast thou ever seriously pondered the question—how soon the opportunity may be past and gone ! —“*How long have I to live?*”

How long have I ? A short time, almost all of us. And those who are past life's mid-day, on whom the glow of sunset is stealing ; those who have crossed the grand climacteric,—passed over the mountain-top, and are beginning to descend the shady side to the grave in the valley,—let them, especially, listen to the warning. Let them imitate the example of the aged chief—seek leisure from over-much and over-many cares, to prepare for death. It is strange that old age is as disinclined as youth to listen to the voice of wisdom in this. You imagine that you can take on new worldly burdens, and reach heaven safe enough notwithstanding ! Ah ! these burdens too often weigh hopelessly down. Like the bee that has wandered from its garden-hive, or its hole in the rock, in

search of honeyed treasure, but which, in winging its way back, drops exhausted, and never reaches home. Old Barzillai was a noble exception to this. With courtier's grace, and a sublime moral fortitude, he declined the regal request, "*Come thou over with me!*"—a question which does not always get a negative from old age, when *Pleasure*, shaking in her hands her chaplets of variegated flowers, cries, "*Come over with me!*"—and *Mammon*, clinking his bags of gold, cries, "*Come over with me!*"—and *Ambition*, pointing to the hazy mountain-top, and her coveted temple gleaming in the sun, cries, "*Come over with me!*"

Be it ours to reply: "I have a nobler heritage now to care for, a nobler temple for which to prepare. The day *will* come when these things will yield me no pleasure,—when they shall be seen in their true light, as the empty baubles of an hour." Oh, what though you may have all that now ministers to the pride of life,—affluence, prosperity, success in business —"*gaining the whole world,*" if you imperil or impoverish your immortal soul? What though life's morning and mid-day be bright and sunny, if you have made no provision for the wet drizzling rain of its afternoon, and find creeping upon you the joylessness of a godless old age. You imagine it will be easy enough to seek God, and find Him amid the dregs of existence, at the close of its weary day. But it will be with you as with the child who imagines, in the bright morning, that it will be safe to spend the sunny hours in play, and put off learning the morrow's task till night. When night comes, the little procrastinator is nodding over the book. Through fatigue and sleep, the unlearnt lesson is abandoned,

and it wakes on the morrow with its pillow bedewed with tears, under the consciousness that its work is undone.

On the other hand, how beautiful is that close of life which is ended with God! "*Mark thou the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.*"* "*And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.*" † What though the sun may have waded through clouds in the early morn?—It has a couch of amber and gold now. The beginning and close of many a Christian's life is like that glorious Alp of which we have previously spoken. Its base and furrowed sides are in mist and cloud; but its white, hoary summit of everlasting snow, is bathed in the crimson hues of fading day.

Be it ours, to live the life of the righteous, that we may come at last to die their death; and standing, like Barzillai, by the brink of Jordan, hear the voice and invitation of a Greater and Mightier than earthly monarch calling us to a seat at His table in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

* Ps. xxxvii, 37.

† Ps. xxi. 4.

VII

Sunset on Mount Zion.

“Fain would I catch a hymn of love
From the angel harps which ring above,
And sing it as my parting breath
Quiver'd and expired in death,
So that those on earth might hear
The harp-notes of another sphere,
And mark, when nature faints and dies,
What springs of heavenly life arise,
And gather from the death they view
A ray of hope to light them through,
When they should be departing too.”

—EDMESTON.

“Now these be the last words of DAVID. . . . Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.”—2 SAM. xxiii. 1, 5.

SUNSET ON MOUNT ZION.

IF we treasure, with peculiar fondness, the last sayings of great men, shall we not, with devout interest, contemplate the closing days of the sweet Singer of Israel—the great Minstrel of the universal Church,—whose hymns have been chanted for three thousand years, gladdening and consoling and comforting millions of aching hearts—and hear his “last words,” * the last cadence of his lyre? Let us watch the shadows gathering over the Hebrew mountains, as this glorious orb in the old hemisphere hastens to his setting;—as a prince in Israel—poet! warrior! king! saint! all in one—is about to expire.

We can imagine the aged DAVID, like another Jacob, seated on his death-couch, or, at all events, with death nigh at hand. The grandeur of earthly empire is fast waning and fading from his view. The pulse, that once beat so manly and strong, is quickly ebbing. His harp had long been laid aside; but, now that he has climbed the hill Beulah and got the first glimpse of the heavenly plains, its melodies must once more be awakened;—his wrinkled hands must again sweep the strings, ere he takes up the nobler minstrelsy of the skies. In notes full of comfort, full of joy, not unblended with warning and sadness, thus he sings:—“*Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for*

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."

Let us, then, open this dying will and testament of "the man after God's own heart." Let us examine (as he repeats them) clause by clause, article by article, in good old David's dying confession of faith; or (to retain our first figure) let us hearken to the successive notes of this remarkable death-song, as these are carried to our ears. Oh that we may make the better part of them, at least, our own, when we come to a similar hour!

The first note from the harp of the dying King is a note of *sadness*. He begins on the minor key—" *Although my house be not so with God.*"

His heart is filled with rapturous joy, standing as he is at the very gate and threshold of glory; but bitter tears *will* force themselves to his dimming eye. At that moment a ray of memory darts across the past; gloomy anticipations, not regarding himself but others, come looming through the future. With faltering voice he begins his song—" *Although my house be not so with God.*"

An old commentator makes the quaint remark on this verse—"There is an '*although*' in every man's life and lot." *Paul* was the mightiest of preachers, the noblest of spiritual heroes, but *he* had his "although;" for "a *thorn in the flesh was sent to buffet him.*" *Jonah* was "exceeding glad because of his gourd," but, a vile insect lurked unseen at its root. *Ezekiel* soared, as few prophets did, with bold wing, amid the magnificent visions of Providence and Grace, but he was brought down to the dust with wings collapsed,—for

“*the desire of his eyes was taken away with a stroke.*”

Ah, dissemble it as we may, this world is a chequered scene, its joys are *mingled* joys, and much *appears* to be joy which is not. Many a heart and countenance wears a *semblance* of gladness, only to conceal its deep sorrow. We cannot always judge of a man by what he seems. Looking at the sea of life, we see it studded over with white sails and gay pennons and sparkling waves; we forget its eddying whirlpools and treacherous reefs and brooding storms. How little do God’s ministers know, in looking down from their pulpits, on apparently bright and sunny faces, gay attire, and undimmed eyes, how many breaking hearts there are;—sorrows, too deep for utterance, with which a stranger dare not intermeddle! No, we cannot let all that *looks* happy, pass for unmingled joy. It is often the reverse; like the wretched singer on the street, who passing from door to door, struggles to warble her *gleeful* songs. *Singing!!* It is a poor counterfeit of crushing sorrow. *Singing!* The *tones* are joyous; but little does the passer-by know of the long tale of woe,—the widow’s agony, the orphan’s tears, the desolate hearth,—which is muffled and dissembled under that apparent “glee.” Pass from pew to pew in our churches, or from door to door in our streets, and how few bosoms indeed would be found in which there is not an “*although.*” “I am strong and vigorous,” says one; “I have health of body and activity of mind, *but*, I am doomed to chill penury!” “I have *wealth*,” says another; “my cup is full, kind fortune has smiled upon me; *but*, I am condemned to drag about with me a suffering frame; my golden treasures are often a mockery to me, for I cannot enjoy them!” “I have both

health and wealth," says another; "but, yonder grave has plundered me of what wealth and health never can purchase back. Mine is the saddest of all '*althoughs*;' mine the bitterest 'crook' in the lot; wealth may come back again; health may again smile upon me; but my children! my children! These treasured barks in the sea of life that have gone down, no power can raise them up again, or bring them to my side!"

Reader! is this not a true picture? We know it is. Be assured it would not be well were it otherwise. Were all bright and sunny and joyous, you would be apt to "settle on your lees." "*The wicked have no changes,*" says the Psalmist, "*therefore they fear not God.*" If the bark were not tossed, the mariners would be asleep. If the thunder were not sent, the air would remain unpurified. If the earthly lamp were not put out, you would never lift your eye to Heaven. These "*althoughs*" are like the rustling among the leaves, which you have seen causing the timid bird to hop upwards, and still upwards, from branch to branch, and from bough to bough, till, attaining the top of the tree, it wings its flight away to a securer shelter!

Let us proceed to the *second clause* in the dying confession of David. He passes now from the plaintive minor key, to happier notes and a happier theme. "*Yet,*"—although my house be not so with God,—"*Yet.*"

We may pause for a moment over that little word. It bears its own message of comfort. It tells us that there are always *solaces* in our trials. The "*althoughs*" of life are generally qualified by some "*yet.*" There is something to

balance our griefs—some counterpart comfort,—so that we can say with the Psalmist, in an earlier period of his life, “*In the multitude of my thoughts (or sorrows) within me, thy comforts delight my soul.*” Listen to his testimony in one of the sorest and saddest experiences of his life. He was never *more* sad ;—an outcast from his throne—wandering beyond Jordan amid the bitter memories of departed glory. “*Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. YET! the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.*” “*I will sing of MERCY and JUDGMENT,*” says he, in another psalm. Oh, how many can utter the same in the midst of their trials! Mark the *order*. He sings of *Judgment*, but *MERCY* comes *first*. Our *mercies* are always greatest. The “*yets*” outbalance and *overbalance* the “*al-thoughts.*” The prophet Habakkuk mourns over the “*fig-tree without blossom,*” vines withered and “*fruitless.*” But amid pining herds and famished flocks, and fields blackened with dearth and pestilence, “*YET,*” he adds, “*will I glory in the Lord and rejoice in the God of my salvation.*”

And is it not so with all God’s true people? Tried believer! are there no *yets* in thy night-song?—no mitigating circumstances in thine affliction?—no “*tempering of the wind to the shorn lamb?*”—no “*staying of God’s rough wind in the day of His east wind?*” The bitter cup has its sweet drops ;—the dark night has its clustering stars of consolation and solace ;—the “*Valley of Baca*” has its wells of joy ;—the warm and green and sunny spots in the wilderness, outnumber the dreary.

But David now passes from these introductory notes, to a full and very glorious burst of gospel triumph.

We have been speaking hitherto of the "*yets*,"—as contrasting *earthly* sorrows with *earthly* solaces; but *here* is the greatest of all consolations,—a *sinner* turning to the overwhelming contemplation of a great Saviour. Having touched *one* tuneless and broken string, he proceeds from the others to extract a sweet melody. "*Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire.*"

Let us mark each successive note in this rich anthem. The theme of it is, "the *Everlasting Covenant.*"

He speaks, first, of the *Author* of the covenant. "*HE hath made.*"

"*He*," my father's God, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,—the God who found me among the sheep-cotes in Bethlehem;—(happy days! when the pastoral staff was my mimic sceptre, the pastoral reed my simple harp, and the starry firmament my temple and palace roof;)—"He," "the Lord my Shepherd," hath made a "covenant" with me! It was *He* who nerved my arm for empire, and tuned my lips for song;—led me to the green pastures of grace, and who has brought me now to the gates of glory!

Never let us forget that it is God, the Eternal Father, who is the Author of our covenant mercies. That it was He, who from the depths of a past eternity, planned that covenant. "*Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love.*"* "God so loved the world." When the temple of fallen humanity

* Jer. xxxi. 3.

lay prostrate in the dust, it was *He* who resolved on the work of reconstruction ;—“ *Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation.*” * When the vessel of our eternal destinies was wrecked and stranded ;—it was a tide flowing from the sea of His own infinite love which set it once more floating on the waters. He might have left us to perish. He might have put a vial into every angel’s hand to pour down vengeance on an apostate race ;—or He might have commissioned His Eternal Son to cast the earth into “the wine-press of His wrath.” He might have “awoke” the sword of Justice from its scabbard to be bathed in the blood of the guilty ! BUT “*God sent NOT his Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but that the world through him might be SAVED.*”

Let us listen to another note in this covenant song,—another article in this covenant deed. The departing monarch’s personal interest in it next engages our thoughts. “*With me.*” “*He hath made with me.*”

Blessed assurance ! Vain would all its wondrous immunities and privileges have been, unless David, in opening the charter deed, had seen his own name in living letters there.

There is nothing that will impart true joy to the soul, but a believing, personal appropriation of the blessings of salvation. It is not enough for the sick man to *know* of a physician—he must make personal application to him for a remedy. It is not sufficient for the faint and thirsty traveller to reach a fountain, or to hear the murmur of the limpid stream,—he must partake of it to be refreshed. The brazen serpent was

* Isa. xxviii. 16.

within sight of the thousands of Israel as they rolled in the desert sand, gasping in agony;—a *look* saved them—but *unless* they looked, they *perished*! The city of refuge was open to the man-slayer;—if he fled thither he was safe; but if he lingered even one footstep without,—the avenger would cut him down! Seek to lay hold, each individually, of the blessings of the gospel covenant, and to be able to say with the appropriating faith of the great apostle, “*He loved ME, and gave himself for ME;*” or, with the Church in the Canticles, “*My Beloved is MINE, and I am HIS.*”*

And what is there to hinder us from making every blessing of the covenant our own? Not God, for “He hath justified!” not Christ, for “He hath died!” We cannot say with the king of Nineveh, “*Who can tell if God will turn?*” He *will* turn. He *HAS* turned. To each individual sinner He declares, “I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.” He seems to take each of us by the hand, leading us to the patriarch’s dying pillow, and saying, in the words He puts into the mouth of Isaiah, “*I will make an everlasting covenant with YOU, even the sure mercies of DAVID!*” Are we ready to reply, “*Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten?*”

But this suggests the next strain in the dying man’s song. It is the *perpetuity* of the covenant—an “*everlasting covenant.*”

Everlasting! What a contrast was that word to the whole former experience of the dying king! He had known of human covenants, and how little worth *they were*. His past

* Cant. ii. 16.

history and life was a fitful and changeful one—a tangled web of vicissitude—a long April day—showers and sunshine.

And so it is, and so it ever shall be, with the ways and works of man. He builds his Babel towers; and in a few centuries, the bleak winds, as they sweep over the deserted ruins, ask in bitter derision, "Where are they?" He rears his hundred-gate cities. Their name has perished. They have become the wild beast's lair; or the sea-waves moan over their dismantled bulwarks!

But it is different with God's works, and with this "work of all works." Amid the changes of a changing world, that covenant remains, "an *everlasting* covenant."

It is *from* everlasting! Wing your flight back to the ages of eternity when it originated. How blessed to think that, *then*, God the everlasting Father loved you! Christ the everlasting Son had your name ready to write on His breast-plate! God the Holy Spirit was waiting to utter over the moral chaos, "*Let there be light!*"

And if it be *from* everlasting, it is *to* everlasting. Earth's future, like the past, is full of uncertainty. Look, in these our times, at many of the poor covenants of earth,—unstable as water, they cannot endure;—delusive ropes of sand!—nations alternately becoming friend and foe—the ally turning the aggressor, and the aggressor the ally,—proud ambition trampling in the dust the sacredness of international compacts. But here is the covenant of the everlasting God. It is a golden chain, stretching in unbroken links from the eternity that is past, to the eternity that is to come!

Reader! if you be a saint of God,—if you can say with David "*He hath made with ME,*"—what a security is yours!

Your title-deeds are *from* everlasting. "Predestinated unto the adoption of children;"—"heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ"—you can utter the unanswerable challenge, "*Who shall separate me from His love?*"

And observe, just in passing, an incidental clause in the dying patriarch's confession regarding this covenant,—*that he was already in possession* of it.

"*He HATH made!*" Not that he was standing then at the gate of heaven, about to have that charter put by angels into his hand, and his name for *the first* time engrossed in it. It was a compact in which he was already personally interested. He had rested on it during many a weary and forlorn hour in his bypast pilgrimage. "*O Lord, thou ART my God,*" had often made "the wilderness and solitary place glad." It was not some far-distant shelter whither he had to flee when the storm overtook him. He was there already. He had long sat under the shadow of this "great Rock in a weary land!"

Christian! think of your *present* safety and security. If you have closed with God's offers of mercy in Jesus, you are even *now* within the bonds of this everlasting covenant. You can *now* look up to Him with a child's confidence and trust, and utter the endearing name,—"*My Father!*"

But, to hasten to the remaining words of the dying minstrel regarding this covenant; observe *next*, "*It is ordered,*"—"ORDERED."

Which of the works of God are not pervaded by a beautiful *order*? Think of the succession of day and night.

Think of the revolution of the seasons. Think of the stars as they walk in their majestic courses,—one great law of harmony “binding the sweet influences of the Pleiades, . . . and guiding Arcturus with his sons.”* Look upwards, amid the magnificence of night, to that crowded concave,—worlds piled on worlds,—and yet see the calm grandeur of that stately march;—not a discordant note there to mar the harmony, though wheeling at an inconceivable velocity in their intricate and devious orbits!

These heavenly sentinels all keep their appointed watch-towers. These Levites in the upper firmament, light their altar-fires “at the time of the evening incense,” and quench them again, when the sun, who is appointed to rule the day, walks forth from his chamber. “*These wait all upon thee.*” † “*They continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants.*” ‡

The same wondrous *order* obtains in the covenant of Grace. We see every attribute of God constellating in beauteous harmony around the cross of Jesus;—Mercy, Truth, Holiness, Justice, casting a reflected glory on the central throne, and each throwing a lustre on the other. The claims of the law have been fully met. It is not a salvation founded on some shadowy, indefinite trust in God’s mercy, but it is a salvation based upon everlasting righteousness. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have combined to make every stone in the covenant building *secure*. God points us to the everlasting mountains,—the great barriers of creation, nature’s mightiest types of immutability,—and says, “*The*

* Job xxxviii. 31, 32.

† Ps. civ. 27.

‡ Ps. cxix. 91.

*mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed.**

Again, it is ordered "*in all things.*"

Not a want, believer, you can have, but what is supplied *here*. Christ is your Prophet, Priest, and King; God is your Father; the Holy Spirit is your Sanctifier, Guide, Comforter; the blessings of the covenant,—justification, adoption, sanctification, peace in life, support in perplexity, triumph in death, grace here, glory hereafter;—all the events of your life—its incidents, its accidents, its vicissitudes—are the *ordered* "all things" of this well-ordered covenant. God—"the God of all grace"—promises to give you all "*all-sufficiency in all things.*" "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." †

The next note in the dying song is, that this covenant is "*sure.*"

What is sure or abiding under the sun? Our *health*? The strong frame may in a moment be bowed, and the hectic glow mount to the cheek of manhood. Our *wealth*? It may breed its own worm, and take wings and flee away. Our *friends*? A word—a look—may estrange some;—the grave, in the case of others, may have put its impressive mockery on the dream of earth's immortality. Our *homes*? The summons comes to strike our tent, and leave behind us the smouldering hearths of a hallowed past,—so that "the place that once knew us, knows us no more."

* Isa. liv. 10.

† Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

But *here* is one thing *sure*. Here is a covenant which has the pillars of immutability to rest upon. Casting your anchor within the veil, you will outride the storm; the golden chain of covenant grace links you to the throne of God! That covenant is as sure as everlasting truth and power and righteousness can make it. The blood of Jesus purchased it, and the intercession of Jesus secures it. Mark, it is not "I have made with *Him*"—(that would be a poor security; how the brittle reed would bend to every storm!)—but it is "HE hath made with ME." The saint's watchword and guarantee is this—"Nevertheless, *I am continually with thee.*" "THOU hast holden me by my right hand."*

"This," he adds, as the closing note of his song—"this is all my salvation."

He needed no more. He had sung a short while before, in that beautiful 72d Psalm, of the glories of the Messiah's kingdom. He had seen with the eye of faith that kingdom extending from pole to pole, and from shore to shore. He had heard with prophetic ear, the gospel strain chanted "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." He seems to have felt at the time, as if with these glowing anticipations he could put aside his harp for ever,—that such would be a befitting close to a minstrel life;—"Amen, and amen," he said; "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."

But no! As he is now really drawing near the end of his pilgrimage, the spirit of the old man "revives." He had sweetly sung of Christ as the Saviour of a WORLD. But he

* Ps. lxxiii. 23.

is now himself about to pass through the swellings of Jordan;—he must again take down that harp to sing of Him as his *own* Redeemer. “*He is all my salvation!*” Oh, what a word for a dying man and a dying hour! Christ “all in all.” He had no other trust. He needed no other.

Reader, it is on a dying couch, be assured, you will be led most deeply to experience the preciousness of an undivided trust in the Saviour. All other cobweb confidences shall then be swept away. It has been the significant, triumphant utterance of a thousand death-beds, “*Neither is there salvation in any other.*” Surely if any man could have felt otherwise, it was David. True, he had great sins; presumptuous sins; but he had great and manifold graces also;—manifold subjects for glorying in, to which many at least would have been inclined to cleave. As a King, he had served faithfully his day and generation. He had raised the covenant nation and people to a high pitch of prosperity. He had the materials collected for a majestic Sanctuary for his God. He had prepared for unborn millions the noblest of liturgies. But, see his last deed! He hangs his harp on the cross of Calvary, saying of a Saviour “whom, having not seen,” he “loved”—“*He is all my salvation!*”

“Other refuge I have none:

Hangs my helpless soul on Thee!”

Once more; he adds, “*He is all my DESIRE,*” (or “my *delight,*” as that word may mean.) In comparison with this, (his covenant God,) all earthly objects had lost their attractions. The stars that helped to light up the Valley of Tears, were now dimming before a Brighter Sun; the false glitter of the world, and the magnificence of empire, were fading

before the rays of heavenly glory. He could say, with a meaning his own words never had before,—“*Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*”

We, too, shall come, some day, to see the false and fascinating joys of earth in their true light;—like the bubble on the stream, dancing its little moment on the surface, and then vanishing for ever! Ah! how cheerless will old age be, if it know no better than earthly delights, wherewith to fill the aching void of the jaded spirit; how helpless, if it find the world's scaffolding removed, and no higher and nobler prop in its place to bear the sweep of the storm! Take God as “the strength of your heart,” that He may be “your portion for ever;”—yours in a *living* hour, that He may be yours in a dying hour. “*He is all my delight!*” Nothing *else*—nothing *less*, can satisfy the cravings of an immortal spirit. All other happiness is a mimic happiness—a wretched counterfeit of the true;—a base alloy, on which Satan may have stamped the currency of *heaven*—but it is “of the earth, earthy,” and upon it *Death* will put an extinguisher for ever!

We could almost have wished that the strains of the sweet Singer of Israel had ended here,—that his had been a glorious, unclouded “SUNSET.” But this “bird of Paradise” mounting upwards, and singing so joyously as he nears the golden caves of heaven—utters, just as he is almost lost from our sight, *one other wailing* note. We dare not pass it unnoticed, for it is an instructive one, full of solemn monition. He repeats his opening sentence—“*Although he make it not*

to grow." It was a sentence the departing monarch must have uttered through his tears.

His happiness would have been complete could he have left the world with the joyous thought, "God is my covenant God—my salvation—my delight—my desire. I am soon to bask in His presence; and, what augments these glorious prospects, is the assurance that I am not alone;—that 'my house,' my family, are also 'so *with God*;'—I can bid earth farewell, knowing that my harp will be swept by the hand of my children's children,—that they will rejoice to follow their father's steps, and share in his incorruptible crown. *THIS God shall be their God for ever and ever.*"

But, alas! they are far different thoughts which, for a moment, choke the utterance of the dying king. That covenant, in their case, is "*not to grow.*" It is (so far as earth is concerned) a *sad* farewell; for more than one of these his own children have embittered his life. They are to dishonour his name, desecrate his grave, and forsake his God.

And worse than all is the self-interrogation, *Why* all this? Ah! conscience could not fail to recall *his own sin*, as the sad and humiliating cause of family degeneracy. The words of Nathan, planted a thorn in that dying pillow. He was himself guiltily responsible for his house being "*aliens to the*" (*spiritual*) "*commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise.*" Reader, see to it, that you do not embitter your death-bed with the agonizing reflection, that by your own sins, or by the force of evil example, you bequeath a heritage of woe to those that come after you, and with anguish like that of David your gray hairs "*go down with sorrow to the grave.*"

On this we shall not dwell. Let us not mar those notes of joy by dwelling on this closing dirge of sorrow. Let us rather contemplate a house that "is so with God." Let us rather picture the beautiful spectacle of a whole family, linked in the indissoluble bonds of the one "everlasting covenant," treading the same pilgrim pathway, and anticipating the same pilgrim rest;—a father and mother bending their knees in prayer for their little ones,—themselves living a life of high-toned consistency—their children rising up and calling them blessed:—in affliction resigned; in provocation meek; in sickness sympathising; and the epitaph on the family grave-stone, written by man and ratified by God—" *These all died in faith.*" "*Of such is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Are we prepared to lie down on our death-beds, and to exult, as David did, in hopes full of immortality? Can we omit the only note of sorrow in his song, and make the words of the dying warrior our own? Can we sing it in *life* amid all its changes? Can we sing it in *affliction*, amid all its tears? Can we sing it as we walk through the valley of *death-shade*? Can we take it with us, as our passport at the golden gates?—" *HE hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire!*"

VIII.

Two Sunsets on the Hills of Jericho.

“His was the pomp, the crowded hall;
But where is now the proud display?
His riches, honours, pleasures, all
Desire could frame; but where are they?
And he—as some tall rock that stands,
Protected by the circling sea,
Surrounded by admiring bands—
Seem'd proudly strong; and where is he?
• • • • •

“The life has gone, the breath has fled,
And what has been no more shall be;
The well-known form, the welcome tread,
Oh! where are they? and where is he?”

—NEELE

“In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in ABIRAM his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son SEGUB, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.”—1 KINGS xvi. 34.

TWO SUNSETS ON THE HILLS OF JERICHO.

IN the midst of the reign of an idolatrous king of Israel, we come to an epitaph on the gravestone of two children, within the city of Jericho.

It is probable that the whole family of HIEL THE BETH-ELITE lie entombed in that rocky cave. Two blossoms, at all events, have been nipped in the bud—two “little suns” have set on the mountains of Judah,—going down “ere it is yet day.”

As we stand on the heights of Jericho, beside this newly-hewn sepulchre, with the Jordan flowing through the green plains below ;—let us inquire why it is that these two youthful pilgrims have been called so soon to tread the waves of the *typical* Jordan ;—why these two little lives have been so prematurely taken.

There is always a solemn and saddening interest surrounding the death-beds and the graves of the young. There are often, though we understand them not, wise and loving reasons for these early removals. It is God’s own inscription, though it often cannot be read through our blinding tears—“*Taken from the evil to come.*” Parents often erroneously infer that the Lord has been inflicting merited retribution on themselves, for their own sins, by snatching away “the desire of their eyes with a stroke ;” while in reality it was some gracious purpose regarding the little ones them-

selves, sparing them unforeseen experiences of sorrow and sin, and gifting them with an early crown.

In this passage of sacred story, however, we have a special exception. Jehovah here vindicates His own word and righteousness, in writing the household of this Beth-elite childless. It is a story of significant warning and instruction. Though dead, these silent tongues still solemnly speak.

Jericho, the old city of palms, had been lying in ruins for five hundred years, ever since the Israelitish conquest. God had pronounced by the lips of Joshua a solemn curse on the man who should dare to rebuild it—“*And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho; he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.*” That curse had been handed down from generation to generation. Many, doubtless, as they passed nigh the site of the old city, and saw the magnificence of its situation as “*the key of Palestine,*” with its two valleys behind, each pouring into it a fertilising stream;—the magnificent forest of palm-trees for miles on every side—the Jordan flowing, with rapid torrent, amid rare luxuriance, on its way to the Dead Sea;—many who witnessed all these manifold natural advantages, would long to see the walls of the city again restored, and its ramparts rebuilt, as when Israel first beheld them from the opposite valleys of Moab.

But any such longing was immediately repressed, when they recalled the stringent prohibition which threatened bereavement and death to the man that should dare to con-

travene a Divine decree. It must have been an impressive sight to see the old ruins, "beautiful for situation," scattered as they had been for ages, untouched by the hand of man; the shepherd alone, perhaps, following his flock amid the rank herbage,—or the wandering Arab, then, as now, pitching his tent amid the moss-grown stones. But no builder dared set his foot among them, lest haply he might be found "fighting against God."

At last a bold, defiant spirit rises up, to make the daring venture. A dweller in Jacob's old city,—which had now, alas! by the worship of Ahab's golden calves, sadly belied its name as "the House of God,"—*Hiel the Beth-elite* rises up, in impious pride, to brave the prohibition, and risk the awful consequences. But who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? He enters the proscribed ground, and already,—just as he has begun to dig the foundation for a new capital,—a messenger speeds from his dwelling with heavy tidings. In digging these forbidden foundations, he has dug the grave of his first-born son! On the first stone of the old ruins being removed, an arrow sped from the quiver of God with unerring aim, and laid low the pride of his heart.

Will he take warning? Another child still is left,—his youngest—probably his only other—his Benjamin—his best beloved. Amid the bitterness of the first bereavement, he fastens the severed tendrils of affection around his surviving boy, saying, "This same shall comfort us." Surely now at least he will profit by the awful voice of warning! The Hebrew workmen will be disbanded from their cursed enterprise, and desolation will once more be installed amid the lonely ruins.

Nay, it has been well said by the preacher, "*The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.*"* The arrow is again on the string. He refuses to humble himself by repentance,—own the Divine hand, and desist from his impious enterprise. With "hardened and impenitent heart" he spurns the awful counsel, and will none of the reproof!

He has cleared the foundations. Stone by stone, edifice by edifice is rising;—an imposing city again crowns the Jordan-heights, and looks forth amid its forests of majestic palms. Hiel, inflated with pride, forgets the early warning. If staggered at first by the occurrence of the death of his first-born, simultaneously with the digging of the city's foundations, he speaks of it, as we often find many still doing in similar circumstances, only as "a strange and unhappy *coincidence.*" His inmost thought is, "Let me bury my vain grief for the loss of my first-born. I have yet a son called by my name. He will be the pride of my family. He will transmit my name to posterity as the founder of the second Jericho."

The battlements are reared. The walls are completed. Perhaps thousands are congregated to witness the last act in the bold enterprise,—raising the ponderous gates of iron on their hinges. Something like the ovation of a conqueror awaits the hero of the day. Hiel's bosom is swelling at the moment with the one dominant thought—" *This is the great city I have built.*" But another messenger, at that moment,—like him who sped to the patriarch of a former age—comes

* Eccles. ix. 3.

with the heaviest tidings a parent's heart can hear. The voice of triumph is that day turned to mourning. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not," and his own obdurate disregard of the Divine command compels the taking of "Benjamin also." The first procession we see treading the new streets is a *funeral crowd*. Hiel is the chief mourner. He is bearing his last—his only one—to the rocky vault where his first-born lies. He has rushed with madness against the bosses of Jehovah's buckler, and terrible has been the price of his hardihood and sin; for "*He has laid the foundation in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.*"

As that mournful procession is pacing the streets, let us join it in thought, and gather solemn lessons and warning for ourselves.

What could have induced Hiel to brave so solemn a prohibition, and risk incurring so awful a penalty?—A Bethelite—a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"—he must, like all his brethren, have been abundantly cognisant of the curse recorded by Israel's leader. It was the nursery tale of every Hebrew mother to her child. How came he to be so mad and foolhardy as to dare the Almighty's displeasure, and serve himself heir to the curse? To get his name immortalised as the founder of a city, was a poor equivalent for the irreparable loss. And, independent of natural affection, to a Jew, (as the possible ancestor of Messiah,) the heaviest infliction was the deprivation of his offspring.

Let us try to conjecture one or two reasons for Hiel's contemptuous disregard of the Divine command.

To take the extreme view of his character, Hiel (Israelite by name as he was) may have been in heart, like many professing religionists still, a practical *Infidel* and *Atheist*. We know that, under Ahab's reign of unparalleled wickedness and irreligion, many were contaminated with the impiety of the reigning monarch. God, the God of their fathers, was by multitudes virtually disowned. Hiel may have denounced the whole story of the threatened curse as a fable,—a bugbear and delusion;—some old legend of a lying prophet,—the falsehood palmed on a credulous age and people; and when, passing oftentimes along the valley of the Jordan, he saw that marvellous site abandoned to ruin and decay, solely, as he surmised, on account of a foolish superstition, he at length resolved to expose and unmask the lie. He put forth his hand, like Achan, to touch the accursed thing; saying in his heart, in the words of the wicked boasters of old, with a proud, self-confident, infidel sneer, "*The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard.*"* But woe to the worm of the dust that contendeth with his Maker! As wave after wave sweeps over his household, the solemn truth is brought home to him,—the confession is extorted from him amid the wail of death—"Who hath hardened himself against the Lord, and prospered?"† "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"‡

How many are there, it is to be feared, with Hiel's spirit still among ourselves! God has put a solemn curse on the man who will dare to upbuild the city of iniquity. He has put a curse, too, on the neglecter of salvation. He has solemnly declared, "*Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not*

* Ps. xciv. 7.

† Job. ix. 4.

‡ Heb. x. 31.

be unpunished."* But there are those (bearing, it may be, like Hiel, the name of Israelite),—outward professors,—who carry inwardly Hiel's atheist heart. They spurn God's curse; they treat His solemn averments about death, judgment, eternity, as idle tales. Ay, and there is so much, to them, startling, and apparently inconsistent, in the providential government of God, that, in their secret thoughts, they deny alike a moral government and a moral Governor. Regardless of consequences, "they will take their chance;" they will outbrave these denunciations;—they will build where God has forbidden to build. They say, with the people to whom Ezekiel prophesied, "*The Lord hath forsaken the earth;*"†—what care we for lying prophets—enthusiastic dreamers!—neither nature nor experience endorses these pulpit utterances and Bible threats. "We will walk in the light of our own eyes. Who is the Lord, that He should reign over us?"

"Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" "Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."‡ God may not, as in the case of Hiel, undeceive you, in this world, in your atheist-dream. He seldom now, as in the old dispensation, makes visible and temporal retribution to descend on the scorers of His word and warnings; sentence against an evil work is not now, as it then was, "executed speedily," and therefore the hearts of the sons of men are all the more "*fully set in them to do evil.*" But there is a day coming, when, as the gates of death close upon you, (as Hiel's gates closed on Jericho,) the Divine denunciations shall be awfully verified; and the conviction be

* Prov. xi. 21.

† Ezek. viii. 12.

‡ Isa. iii. 11.

solemnly flashed upon you, (shall it be for the first time?) before the great white throne, "*Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth!*"

But let us pass to a more modified view of Hiel's self-delusion. In rebuilding Jericho, he may have had an honest belief in the being and power of the God of his fathers, as well as in the truthfulness and reality of Joshua's warning. But he may have been influenced by the thought that the stringency of the old prohibition may now have been relaxed; that what was imperative enough in Joshua's time, was not so binding after the lapse of five centuries. Time does much in softening the rigour of man. He may have measured the Divine feelings and procedure by a comparison with the human; he may have concluded that God had now modified the severity of the olden curse. "There surely" (he would argue) "could be no great sin, or risk, or danger *now*, in rescuing a noble site from ruin, and erecting a strong frontier-city to guard incursions from the border-tribes of Moab. The curse, binding and literal at the time, had now, surely, become obsolete." He may have even made out a case of *necessity*; that he was only doing a patriot's deed, for which he would be lauded in all coming time as one of the heroes of the nation!

Man may change, but God *never can*. "*One day is with the Lord as a thousand years.*" When God pronounces a curse, it is not as a human being, who is influenced by momentary emotion, passion, prejudice. The wrath of God is not a passion, but a *principle*. It is the calm, deep, deliberate recoil of His nature from sin. His word is unalterable,—His judgments are subject to no waywardness or caprice.

How many there are, in these days of ours, who apply Hiel's false reasoning to the Word of God and its solemn averments. Disciples, as they call themselves, of a dreamy dogma ;—or theory of "*development*," who dare to speak and write of the Bible as an antiquated book, containing only the utterances of some Jewish shepherds, and vinedressers, and fishermen ; and whose day, and meaning, and obligations are past. As "progress," say they, is the world's normal law, so there is advance here, as in everything else. This Bible, with its old-world threatenings, was all very well for that old-world state of things,—when it was a child, and spake as a child, and understood as a child. But now the world has reached its manhood, and "put away childish things." The Bible curses are contained in the code of "*the law which gendereth to bondage*." We live under the *Gospel*, and the truth has made us free. The God that spoke in curses amid the blackness, darkness, and tempest of Sinai, is not the God who now speaks to us from heaven.

He is ! The same "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.*"* And hear how that Son speaks ;—they are his own living utterances :—"*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*" † His word is very faithful. His word and His throne have immutability to rest upon. "*I am the Lord ; I change not.*" ‡ "*These things,*" he says to every such pre-

* Heb. i. 1.

† Mat. v. 17, 18.

‡ Mal. iii. 6.

sumptuous dreamer, "*these things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest*" that I was changed,—that I had altered the thing that had gone forth out of my mouth,—"*that I was altogether such an one as thyself.*" But I will demonstrate my righteous adhesion to every threat against "the workers of iniquity." "*I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*"*

Let us beware of measuring God by our puny selves. Oblivion does its work with *us*. Time, like the waves of the sea on the rippled sand, obliterates much of the memories of sin; and because it does so, we are apt impiously to dream that such is the case with God also. But He is "*the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*" The past, and present, and future are to Him alike. There was to Him, no measurable period of time between Joshua's utterance of the curse against a builder of the doomed city, and Hiel's futile attempt to fight against it. Be assured, all that God hath said in His Word in ages past remains uncanceled, unaltered, and unalterable, to this hour. We may well write, "*Thus saith the Lord,*" on every curse, as well as every blessing. With the memorable example and signal retribution of Hiel before us, let us make it our earnest prayer, "*Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.*"

We have just surmised, that one false idea which Hiel may have fostered, and trusted in, was, that the lapse of ages had modified the stringency of the old prohibition. He may also have been influenced in his undertaking by an expectation that God would not rigidly stand to His word—

* Ps. l. 21.

that He would not adhere so sternly to His threat, as many supposed and dreaded He would.

Perhaps he might be strengthened in this supposition by what he had observed in his own native city of Bethel. He had there seen that same God of Israel foully dishonoured,—His name blasphemed,—His word and authority scorned,—golden calves and Baal-shrines polluting the sacred places;—and yet, notwithstanding, He had interposed with no visible judgment. He seemed to “wink” at these heinous sins. He had visited the idolaters with no retribution. Hiel, from all this, may have drawn the unwarrantable conclusion that Jehovah was not rigid in the enforcement of His threats;—that He did not mean all He said;—that, having apparently overlooked the Bethel calf-worshippers, He would not be over severe on the less heinous sin of braving His curse in the building of Jericho.

He makes the awful venture. But first, over the grave of his elder, and then of his younger son, he is brought to read the inscription—“*God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.*” As he returns, through the streets of the new-built city, to his rifled home, and as he marks the two vacant seats in his desolate house, he could say—(may we hope it was through penitent tears of shame and sorrow and devout humiliation),—“*God hath spoken once, yea, TWICE have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God!*”

Ah! is not Hiel’s reasoning here, too, the ruinous, soul-deluding reasoning of multitudes still? There is no more common or fallacious argument than this:—“God will not be over-strict. His nature and His name are love. He never

could, and *never will*, curse the creature of His own making. These denunciations will be modified and softened at the Great Day. His justice will merge into compassion. Stern Retribution will descend these iron steps, and Mercy will ascend triumphant to her golden throne."

"*Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*" Go back to these twin graves at Jericho, and read in them the great principle of God's moral government—that when He says, "*Cursed be the man,*" He means "*cursed,*" and when He says, "*Blessed,*" He means "*blessed.*"

You remember, when Saul ventured on a similar unworthy tampering with the Word of God, in the commanded extirpation of Amalek, and reserved (contrary to an express injunction) King Agag and the goodliest portion of his flocks and herds. He doubtless imagined that there was no great evil in the reservation itself;—that, at all events, God would overlook it;—that He would visit so trivial a departure from the letter of His Word with no great severity. What was the result? Saul lost his kingdom. The prophet of Jehovah stood before the monarch, confronting him with the question, "*What meaneth this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?*" "*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*"* The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, (and that is a blessed truth to us!) But let us always view it side by side with its counterpart—"The Lord is not slack concerning his threatenings." When we see vice apparently unrebuked, walking with unblushing front, pillowed often in affluence,—the wicked apparently with no

* 1 Sam. xv. 23.

bands either in their life or death ;—we are apt to draw the false inference that God is, like Baal, “asleep”—that He has flung the reins of His moral government loose to chance—that He takes “no account of these matters.” But though it is true that His dealings now-a-days are so far altered from those of the earlier dispensation, that transgression is not followed by temporal retribution,—yet judgment is in awful *reversion*. The sinner treasures up to himself “wrath against the day of wrath.” God is saying now, in words He uttered of old to Isaiah, “*I will take my rest ; I will CONSIDER in my dwelling-place.*”* This is the time for His “*considering.*” The weapon of vengeance is still sheathed. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. He *waits* to be gracious. But let us not misconstrue His forbearance as if it denoted any alteration in His purposes. If not now, at least hereafter, on the Great Day, the awful truth shall be made manifest : “*Be sure your sin will find you out.*” “*Walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes ; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*” †

The great practical lesson from all this subject is, *Beware of resisting God.*

Ever and anon He speaks to all of us solemnly in His providences. Let us beware of attempts to stifle His voice and precipitate our own ruin. Hiel’s offence was deeply aggravated. When the impious builder, in digging the city’s foundation, carried to the grave his elder-born,—he might well have bowed his head in the dust,—owned God’s sovereignty, and “turned at His reproof.” But he despised all

* Isa. xviii. 4.

† Eccles. xi. 9.

His counsel. The solemn warning failed to impede him in his unrighteous resolution. The buildings rose; but he was only thereby exposing his bosom to another dart of death.

How many there are among ourselves like Hiel! Reader! God has spoken to you *once* by some solemn warning;—by sickness—by worldly loss—by opening perhaps the grave of your child. Have you listened to His voice?—Have you bowed to the rod?—Have you profited by the warning?—Or is it the case that the monition has passed and gone?—that the Jericho of pleasure or sin is rearing just as before,—provoking Him to new, and, it may be, severer judgments?

“*Harden not your hearts.*” “*Exhort one another,*” says the apostle, “*while it is called to-day, lest any of you be HARDENED through the deceitfulness of sin.*” Beware, like Moab, of “settling on your lees,” of getting into that awful state of callousness and indifference, alike under warning and mercy;—“*nourishing your hearts for a day of slaughter.*” * In the case of Hiel, it was a presumptuous hardening after God had solemnly pled with him through tears of parental anguish. Remember that solemn word—“*He that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*” * Are any who read these words sinning in the face of solemn monitions, when God is giving them “line upon line, precept upon precept”—speaking to them by “earthquake,” or “whirlwind,” or “fire,” or “the still small voice?” Be assured He will yet make inquisition for these rejected warnings—this unrequited love! Go in thought to Jericho. Stop and read the epitaph on that tombstone—“*Consider THIS, ye that forget God!*”

* Prov. xxix. 1.

One other sentence in conclusion. Let none suppose, from all that has been suggested by this subject, that we entertain a repulsive theology;—a theology that would represent God—the loving Father of His people—as a vindictive Being, armed with curses, stronger to smite, than “strong to save.” He visits indeed “iniquity unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him;” but He shews “mercy unto thousands of them that love him.” While “He can by no means clear the guilty,” yet “He delighteth in mercy.” His blessings are more abundant than His curses. His gospel message begins with the proclamation of “peace on earth and good-will to men;” and it ends with the invitation, “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.” * The infatuated builders of every city of sin—what can they expect but ruin and disaster? But “we HAVE a strong city—salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks;” and He who, by His own blood, purchased a right to bestow upon us that city, says, as He stands by its gates, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” † Yes, say not that we teach a gloomy theology with such a God as this;—who, in order that He might be a Father to us, “spared not HIS own Son.” Hiel, from pride and vainglory, sacrificed HIS son in laying the foundation of an earthly city. But we can tell of a great Being who, in laying the foundations of a more magnificent city than earth ever saw, surrendered “His only-begotten,” His “well-beloved.” He laid its foundations,—He set up its immortal gates in the death of His First-born; and all in order that guilty, worthless sinners might be saved!—that in the exercise of His

* Rev. xxii. 17.

† Matt. xi. 28.

paternal love, He might embrace a lost world in the arms of His mercy, and exclaim, "*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!*"

That city expands its sheltering portals to all. None are forbidden to enter. We are encouraged to "*open the gates, that the righteous* (those made righteous through the righteousness of another) *may enter in.*" A city in which—unlike that of which we have been speaking—the wail of the mourner is never heard, and where death never enters!

Oh, look away from all human shelters to that "*city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" Be assured, all who are content with building for earth the Jerichos of the present, shall find there the grave of their hopes. But "*they of THIS city shall flourish like grass on the earth.*" "*The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever!*"



IX.

A Long Day and Late Sunset.

“When he wrapp’d
His purple mantle gloriously around,
And took the homage of the princely hills
And ancient forests, as they bow’d them down
Each in his order of nobility.
And then, in glorious pomp, the sun retired
Behind that solemn shadow, and his train
Of crimson and of azure and of gold,
Went floating up the zenith, tint on tint,
And ray on ray, till all the concave caught
His parting benediction.”

“But JEHOIADA waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.”—2 CHRON. xxiv. 15, 16.

A LONG DAY AND LATE SUNSET.

THAT must have been a remarkable spectacle in Jerusalem, when this funeral procession was seen wending along the ridge of Mount Zion, on its way to the sepulchre of the kings. No royal head has bowed to the stroke of death,—and yet the gates of that sacred mausoleum, which holds the dust of David, Solomon, and the succeeding kings, have that day been flung open to receive an addition to its silent trust!

Who can be the newly-embalmed and shrouded occupant for the long home of silence? For whom has a nation decreed this strange, unwonted honour? Honour, indeed, it was; for zealously were these precincts guarded against unworthy entrants. Royalty itself was not always a passport through these gloomy portals, if life had been stained with dishonour or crime. The very last king who died in his palace in Jerusalem (though the blood of David flowed in his veins) was deemed unmeet to repose along with the dust of his sires. After an inglorious reign of eight years Jehoram was buried, we are told, "*in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.*" *

Who, then, is this honoured subject for whom regal obsequies are appointed, whilst his master is left to his long slumber in a meaner resting-place? No regalia, no imposing symbols of royalty, are carried alongside that bier; yet the

* 2 Chron. xxi. 20.

long funeral crowd, and the undisguised, undissembled lamentations, truthfully proclaim that “a prince in Israel has fallen.”

True, JEHOIADA, in his official position, as God’s high priest, was worthy of all honour ; yet, most of the Jewish pontiff’s passed to their graves in strict privacy, without leaving in the sacred chronicles even a register of their death or burial. It was his character and worth, not his position, which gathered that mourning crowd, and opened that place of honoured interment ! We are summoned in thought to the funeral of a faithful public servant,—a venerable patriarch,—a minister and man of God ;—one who, for the long period of one hundred and thirty years, had lived out that great definition of spiritual existence, “to *be good* and to *do good*.” His name was not associated with great hero-deeds or brilliant martial exploits. He had a better and nobler vocation. By his piety and zeal, his prudence and sagacity, he had steered the ark of God amid environing storms. Half a generation—thirty years—had passed, since he had been able to engage in active duty ; but even that long “sunset”—that period of deepening twilight—was one, too, of sacred and momentous influence. Alas ! no sooner had his hand left the helm, and death sealed his eyes, than the ark was once more among the breakers. His brother Hebrews, therefore, had not miscalculated his worth when they followed his body to its grave with tears, and decreed to him regal obsequies.

The funeral is all left to imagination. The sepulchre on Zion has long ago mouldered with the royal dust which for ages it enclosed ; but the epitaph on Jehoiada’s shrine is still

left deathless and imperishable on the pages of Scripture—
“*They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.*”

As we read his panegyric let us select, among others, three features of his character which stand out with special prominence—his *faith*, his *intrepidity*, and his *disinterestedness*.

I. *His faith.*

His lot, as we have just said, was cast in a stormy period of Judah's history. It will require a brief historical summary to put the reader in possession of the ecclesiastical and political exigencies of the time.

One of the basest and most unscrupulous of tyrants (a disgrace to her sex) swayed at this moment the usurped sceptre of the house of David. It was the one only blot in the fair fame of good Jehoshaphat, that, from motives of worldly policy (oh, how many in a similar way blight and ruin their children's prospects), he brought about an unhallowed marriage-union between his son and successor to the throne and a daughter of Abab and his infamous queen Jezebel. Athaliah inherited alike the depraved nature and practice of her Syrian mother; she obtained a speedy control over the facile mind of Jehoram, who, obliterating all memory of his father's goodness, plunged into the wild excesses of the house of Abab—importing to Jerusalem Phœnician idolatries, and stripping the very Temple to decorate a shrine for Baal. His name means “*God-exalted*,” but by his own guilty deeds he became rather *God-forsaken*. Philistines and Arabians

were stirred up to inflict on him the divine retribution. They sacked the palaces, dragged his wives and children into captivity—Athaliah and her son Ahaziah alone being left.

Ahaziah's reign was a brief and inglorious one. He fell, mortally wounded, on the heights of Jezreel, and was buried in Samaria. On his unexpected decease, the artful queen-mother, as the only means of perpetuating her power, and of gratifying an unnatural ambition, resolved on the desperate and unscrupulous measure of consigning the remaining seed-royal to a cruel and indiscriminate massacre. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she may not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget.*"* Yes, she *did* forget! It was her own unhappy grandchildren whose blood had to answer the sanguinary edict!

Good old Jehoiada the high priest, at an age extending to nearly a century, looked on in dismay at the inauguration of this reign of terror. He was himself united in marriage to a daughter of Jehoram; and they were jointly cognisant of a fact that had escaped the knowledge of the regicide—viz., that one infant child of the king still survived the cruel extermination. They knew God's promise, and they had faith to believe that it would not fail. "*The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it. Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon THY THRONE.*"† It was a perilous experiment—a bold venture, whose discovery would cost them their lives; but they resolved (confiding the fact to a select few) to secrete this only remaining scion of David's line, with his nurse, in one of the chambers of the Temple.

* Isa. xlix. 15.

† Ps. cxxxii. 11.

Meantime they would watch the favourable moment, to wrest for him the sceptre from the hands of the usurper, and invest him with his hereditary rights.

We can imagine that nothing but a devout *faith* in God could have instigated this pious pair to so perilous a resolve. It was, of all others, a subject for the exercise of faith. The very spot in the sacred corridors where that little one night by night was rocked asleep, seemed to be a pledge of safety and success. Was it not of the temple-courts the Lord Himself said, "THERE *will I make* THE HORN OF DAVID *to bud ; I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.*"* Might not this be the sacred lullaby his aunt loved to sing in the sacred chamber over his cradle, "*In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion ; in the secret of his tabernacle he shall hide me ?*" † Yes! God HAD "*ordained a lamp for his anointed.*" † That lamp was flickering. It was reduced to one feeble spark in the person of a little infant. The extinction of that spark would be the extinguishing of God's promise. But they knew that "what God *had* promised, he was able also to perform." That tiny lamp was confided to their custody. They would do all they could, looking to Him for a blessing, to preserve it from being quenched by the fury of the oppressor. Did not the parents of Moses, in similar circumstances, and in the face of an exterminating massacre, hide their child for three successive months, and "were not afraid of the king's commandment?" In a like spirit, undeterred by the certain vengeance which disclosure of their plot would entail, they are "strong in faith, giving glory to God." ‡

Oh, for a spirit of similar faith in the midst of diffi-

* Ps. cxxxii. 17.

† Ps. xxvii. 5.

‡ Rom. iv. 20.

culties,—believing God's declarations, trusting His faithfulness, and with our finger on His promises, saying, "*Remember this word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope!*" God often puts us in perplexing positions for the trial of our faith. He brings his people, or his Church, into exigencies, where "vain is the help of man," just that we may, with unswerving confidence, cast our burdens upon *Him*, saying, with the Psalmist, "*This I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise His word; in the Lord will I praise His word. In God have I put my trust. I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.*"*

II. Let us note Jehoiada's *boldness* and *intrepidity*.

Boldness in action is the necessary result of faith. It is the principle of faith bearing fruit. Doubtless, Jehoiada had oft and again commended his enterprise in prayer to Him "who dwelt between the cherubim," and was encouraged, by an appeal to the Urim, to go boldly forward.

It was on a Sabbath morning—when the sacrifice was laid on the altar, and the crowd were standing round the outer temple-gates. The fresh relay of priests and Levites had just come in; and the others, whose weekly course that day expired, according to wont, remained inside the sacred enclosure till evening. Thus a double guard—a double force was secured, for the carrying out of the bold plot. The secret, wisely and judiciously confided to a confidential few, had been whispered in other favouring ears. Jehoiada concerted with "*the rulers of hundreds, and the captains,*" and

* Ps. lvi. 9-11.

he said unto them, "*Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David.*"* The votive trophies of battle,—spears and swords which king David had placed in the temple-armoury,—were taken down from the walls on which they had for a century hung. Making use of these weapons, the enrolment of a volunteer band of priests and Levites was speedily completed. These were posted at the several avenues, to guard alike against confusion or attack. On a raised seat or platform, adjoining "*the monarch's pillar,*" with massive golden crown on his head, and the testimony in his hand, stood an innocent boy of seven years of age. It was young Joash, the alone survivor of the murdered family! But *there* he was, God's own pledge that the fruit of David's body should "sit upon his throne!" And now the astounding fact, (for six years carefully concealed from the populace,) that in these priestly chambers there slumbered, night after night, an heir of the throne of Judah, was made known! It spreads with the speed of a conflagration. The shout "*God save the King!*" rises first in the Temple-court. It is caught up by the dense crowd thronging the gates. The strange, unwonted commotion floats across the Tyropean Valley, and is wafted in at the palace windows to the ears of the queen. In a few moments she has crossed the bridge connecting palace and temple. A glance of her infuriate eye reads the whole truth. "*Treason! treason!*" she cries in vain, to her dumb, unpitying, unsuccouring guards. Her life of guilt is fast ebbing to a close—her die is cast. As the shouts of a patriot people are ringing a welcome to their young king, the infamous Athaliah is dragged outside

* 2 Chron. xxiii. 3.

the sacred enclosure to pay the just penalty for her crimes. She lies weltering in her own blood !

We cannot sufficiently admire the calm forethought, the consummate prudence, and the determined intrepidity of Jehoiada. It was an enterprise which required a wise head and a strong hand, as well as a pious heart. We should naturally look, at all events, for the accomplishment of such a plot to other than one whose head was whitened with the snows of a century. In this respect, it is a deed unparalleled in the annals of sacred history. Such exploits generally demand the prime of manhood, when the sun of life is at its meridian. We look for quiet bars of purple and gold—emblems of repose—when that sun is going down ;—then *“the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and those that look out of the windows are darkened ; when fears are in the way, and the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails.”** The stirring ambition, as well as the physical endurance, requisite for such deeds, have then generally declined ; and *when* they occur, we must look for some stronger than any impelling natural principle. GOD had evidently nerved that old man’s arm. He had girded him for the battle. He had, with reference to his old age, verified the truth of that unfailing promise : giving “strength” equal to his “day.” He had answered his prayer—*“O God, thou hast taught me from my youth : and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.”* †

* Eccles. xii. 5.

† Ps. lxxi. 17, 18.

It belongs not to God's ministers to intermeddle with political intrigues, save in the gravest emergencies, when His cause and His Church are concerned in the issue. But it is a remarkable and encouraging fact that, in all great and momentous crises of His Church's history, when its bulwarks have been assailed by enemies without or traitors within, He has ever raised up men adequate for the exigency; sage in counsel; firm in principle; bold and intrepid in action; who have, like Jehoiada, not only been instrumental in sheathing the sword of oppression, "stilling the enemy and the avenger," but in vindicating truth, upholding the cause of righteousness, and transmitting a heritage of spiritual blessings from generation to generation.

III. Let us further mark Jehoiada's *disinterestedness*.

Duty and self-interest are often in conflict and antagonism. It was so with Jehoiada. Had he been a selfish man,—guided (as the world too often is) by *policy*, and sacrificing all that is sacred to base and unworthy personal ambition, he was the very last who should have betrayed any anxiety to shield Joash from the general massacre. Though he himself had no royal blood in his veins, yet (by marrying the sister of the former king) his own son Zechariah was (failing the children of Ahaziah) the heir-apparent to the throne of Judah. If, therefore, on principles of base worldly expediency, he had been careful to secrete any one from the vengeance of Athaliah, it would have been his own child rather than Joash. But this good and honoured man would spurn such sordid baseness. Though he had the

strong temptation of the golden crown glittering on the brows of his own son, with a noble disinterestedness he takes with parental fondness the unprotected orphan and rival under his nurturing roof, and does all in his power to prevent a cruel tyrant stretching forth her hand against the Lord's anointed.

Noble lesson here, too, in the midst of a world and an age of *selfishness!* When we see so many grasping with unscrupulous avidity any tempting bribe;—from avaricious monarchs grasping kingdoms, to avaricious and unscrupulous citizens in private life building their own reputation and fortune on the ruins of another—stooping to base artifice, godless “expediency,” unprincipled policy, in compassing their ends;—oh, it is refreshing to turn to these staunch examples in the olden days, where self-interest spurned to climb the coveted heights on the ruins of a man's life, or means, or character;—willing, disinterestedly, to give way, although another rather than themselves be bettered, if the will and cause of God be promoted,—submitting to any amount of sacrifice for private and public good. “*All seek their own*” is the too truthful motto of these degenerate times; but the noblest feature in a man's character is *abnegation of self*;—if his fellows can point to him and say, “*That man is as much interested in the welfare of others as in his own.*”

If we have dwelt mainly on the one public act of Jehoiada, it is not to the exclusion of the more strictly religious traits of his character and history; for it is evident from the sacred narrative, that what embalmed him most in the memories of Israel—what summoned forth the warmest tears on that day

of his funeral—was his great work in connexion with the repairing of the house of the Lord. His sacred influence had happily been brought to bear upon the young king. “Go out,” was the command of Joash to the Levites—“Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the Lord, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the Lord. So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it.”* Happy for a nation, happy for a church, when they have in their rulers, civil and ecclesiastical, this combination of political sagacity and manly piety;—unflinching alike in their fidelity to the throne and the altar, “rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s:”—who, moreover, imbued with the great truth that it is “righteousness” alone which “exalteth a nation,” deem it the loftiest mission in which they can be embarked, to “lengthen Zion’s cords and strengthen her stakes.” How many there are whose life-long ambition is posthumous fame;—that, like Jehoiada, they may be “buried in the city among the kings,” and on storied urns or marble cenotaphs their names may be handed down to successive generations! God’s Great Ones have a truer and nobler immortality; but if you would have the most enviable immortality *earth* can bestow,—if you would aspire to live in the memories and hearts of those that

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 5, 12, 13.

come after you,—let the panegyric on the old priest of Israel be the coveted epitaph on your lowlier grave-stone,—it may stimulate others, as they read it, to follow your steps,—
“HE HAD DONE GOOD IN ISRAEL, BOTH TOWARDS GOD AND TOWARDS HIS HOUSE.”

Sunset on the Heights of Gilgal.

“Bright clouds! ye are gathering one by one,
 Ye are sweeping in pomp round the dying sun,
 With crimson banner, and golden pall,
 Like a host to their chieftain’s funeral;
 Perchance ye tread to that hallow’d spot
 With a muffled dirge, though we hear it not.

“But methinks ye tower with a lordlier crest,
 And a gorgeous flush as he sinks to rest:
 Not thus in the day of his pride and wrath
 Did ye dare to press on his glorious path;
 At his noontide glance ye have quaked with fear,
 And hasted to hide in your misty sphere.

“Do you say he is dead? You exult in vain,
 With your rainbow robe, and your swelling train;
 He shall rise again with his strong bright ray,
 He shall reign in power when you fade away,
 When you darkly cower in your vapoury hall,
 Tintless, and naked, and noteless, all.”

—SIGOURNEY.

“Now ELISHA was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows: and he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow: and he put his hand upon it; and Elisha put his hands upon the king’s hands. And he said, Open the window eastward: and he opened

it. Then Elisha said, Shoot and he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows: and he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground: and he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times, then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice. And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet."—2 KINGS xiii. 14-21.

SUNSET ON THE HEIGHTS OF GILGAL.

THE quiet glory of this SUNSET corresponds with the antecedent history. We love to seat ourselves on the brow of Gilgal, and watch its disc slowly disappearing over the neighbouring hills.

ELISHA stands out, in sacred story, in striking contrast to his great predecessor, Elijah. The prophet of Horeb had a reflection of his own character in the earthquake, the tempest, and the fire seen from his mountain-cave. He on whom his mantle fell, and whose life-close we are now to consider, had *his* type and symbol in "the still small voice" that succeeded. The one was the Peter, the other the John of the prophetic period. The one, bold, vehement, daring—coming forth with shaggy hair and leathern girdle from the savage glens of Northern Gilead, where he had been "meety nursed" for his life of romantic exploits;—with a mind subject to strong impulses, as easily prostrated as elated. The other, dignified, yet calm,—faithful and uncompromising, yet loving and tender,—the Barnabas of the Old Testament, ("the son of consolation,") amid the stricken homes of Israel. The one is like a meteor blazing through the firmament—startling us with the suddenness of his apparitions, from the moment he appears on the stage of sacred history confronting guilty Ahab, till, with equal suddenness and equal splendour, he is borne majestically to heaven in a chariot of fire. The other

has less of this fitful lustre. Yet in conjunction with milder attributes he has the majesty, too, of the sun "going forth as a bridegroom from his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run his race!" In one word, Elisha was, in the strictest sense, a great and a good man; and in his goodness consisted his greatness. His life is a living sermon. He was to be found in season and out of season,—in every occasion of need. Never do we find him lacking in moral courage. Wherever his word and presence were required to rebuke sin, this righteous man was "bold as a lion!" He seems to grudge no time, no labour, if only his great work be advanced. We find him in royal palaces, in martial camps, in weeping households. At one time, hurling the awful malediction over impenitence and wrong-doing; at another, mingling his tears over "the loved and lost," and then his songs of joy over the lost, raised to be loved again. Poor and unostentatious in dress, in mien, in dwelling, he had been again and again the saviour of his country, and exercised what was equivalent to regal sway in court and city,—by the throne and by the altar. He had fostered, with loving heart, the schools of the prophets,—training, with holy fidelity, those on whom the mantle of his office and example was afterwards to fall. Never was there greater need of such a man than at this crisis of Israel's history. Their sensual idolatries, the deep moral and spiritual degradation of the whole body politic, cried loudly for one who would mingle words of love and wisdom with those of stern rebuke, and who, by the exercise of those miraculous powers which were peculiarly conferred upon him, would bring the people back from their gross materialism to the spiritual worship and national recognition of their fathers' God.

But the time has come when *he*, too, must pay the great debt of nature. Long ere he had attained the mature age at which he died, the old man seems to have retired into comparative obscurity. His brilliant public work was over; and, ere he passed to his rest and his crown, God saw meet to lay him on a couch of sickness in some lonely, unknown dwelling in Israel. It is around that couch we are now summoned. As the sands in his life-glass are slowly falling, grain by grain, come and let us gather a few of the solemn truths which the scene presents.

I. We watch a royal visitor entering the obscure abode of Elisha. It is no other than the king of Israel. And from what we can gather from the brief notices of his history, the remarkable thing about Joash's visit is, that he must have had little sympathy, at all events, with the high-toned and elevated piety of the man of God. With many fair traits of character—intervals of sincere and true devotion—he was still following not a few of the guilty ways of "*Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.*" For this he had, doubtless, been often and again rebuked by the faithful admonitions of the prophet,—he had quailed under his piercing eye,—and evaded, whenever he could, that presence of exalted sanctity. We never hear, during all the sixteen years he had already reigned, of his once coming to him before on a personal visit. But now, when he hears that the aged Seer's end is approaching, he hastens to do homage to the greatness and goodness that are so soon to leave behind them an irreparable blank! Nay, more than this—it is no mere courteous visit. It is not the patronising stoop of supercilious royalty coming to parade vain etiquette and adulation when the

time for just recognition of service is past. But he comes as the representative mourner of a whole nation. He comes to pour out one of the noblest panegyrics ever pronounced over departing or departed worth. It was uttered from a bursting heart, and through eyes moist with weeping.

Mark the picture. (We can imagine no nobler subject for inspired painting.) An old man on the threshold of a century, shrivelled and wasted by long sickness, with pale lip and feeble hand, lies stretched on the couch from which he is never to rise. His monarch stands by, and stoops over him, bathed in a flood of impassioned tears. We read, "*He wept over his face;*" and then broke silence through his choked utterance with the words, "*My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!*"

What meant he by this? In that moment of profound emotion, the king saw in that waning eye—that ebbing life-pulse—that there was about to pass away "a power mightier than all the armies of Israel." "I lose," he cries, "in thee, my best chariots and horsemen; with the decay of these mortal walls of thy frail body, I forfeit my best bulwarks,—my nation's tower of strength. I can recruit my wasted ranks, decimated by famine and pestilence and by the cruel fortunes of war; but I cannot reanimate or recall thy saintly prayers—thy godly counsels—thy commanding influence—thy unsullied example, and untainted life. Thy death will be, as if, by one fearful sweep—one cruel blow—my chariots and horsemen were cast into the depths of the sea,—as if the beauty of Israel was slain in the high places. "*Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!*"

We have here an example of the homage (often tardily

extorted) paid by men of the world to true piety and principle, pure devotion, consistent character, unblemished life. Nay more, it is the assertion by kingly lips of a great truth, from which we may well, in these days, gather comfort and instruction ;—that there are walls and bulwarks constituting a nation's strength, nobler than material strongholds and vast armaments ;—that the great and the good—men of prayer, and men of faith, and men of God—are a nation's noblest defenders, the truest guardians of her liberties, the best rampart of defence around her hearths and homes ! Let us not be guilty of the impiety of measuring a nation's might, in modern times, by her arsenals and dockyards, the stores of her ammunition, and the calibre of her cannon. Thanks be to God, we have all these to boast of too ;—and brave souls, ready to leap, like the sword from its scabbard, to do gallant defence for all that is dear in the hour of peril ! But it is matter of thankfulness that Britain has more than these. She has more than the bravery which had its representative in the furious courage of another contemporary of Elisha, and one divinely appointed to co-operate with him ;—she has more than her "*Sons of Nimshi*," with horses' hoofs spurning the plain as they rush on to battle. She has her ELISHAS too ;—noble, lofty souls,—bold in the maintenance of Christian principle ;—ay, men in her high places, who count not their coronets tarnished because they love their Saviour ; and who are not ashamed to avow their allegiance to the Prince of the kings of the earth. Yes, we may be proud to point to the annals of our country's old martial glory ; to listen to the roll of her conquering drum by land,—the voice of her thunder by sea, challenging the sovereignty of the ocean ;—

The old indomitable lion making its proud leap still, against fearful odds, as on the stern battle-fields of other days. But we own a nobler title to supremacy;—one which preserves our ark in the midst of European storms. “We *have* not only a strong city”—(a strong nation)—but “*Salvation is appointed* for walls and for bulwarks.” While the statesmanship that in some momentous crisis wielded the nation’s destiny is lauded and extolled;—while brilliant homage is awarded to the political sagacity which steered the vessel amid conflicting storms;—while every tongue is justly eloquent in the praises of the valiant squadrons that mounted breach after breach to victory;—while science wins new laurels in girdling our shores with impregnable bulwarks, frowning defiance on every invader;—we may do well also to ask Israel’s king to read to us the grand philosophy of a nation’s greatness,—we may hear his voice echoing in every chamber where a Christian dies,—“*My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!*”

But let us pass to a strange episode in the story of Elisha’s deathbed.

The old prophet has all the love of his country, as well as of his God, still unquenched in his bosom. And with the grand heroism of a dying patriot, he gives a significant token and assurance of success over their hereditary foe, to the king and nation to whom he is so soon to bid adieu for ever.

He tells the young monarch to take his bow and quiver,—and opening the eastern window of the sick-chamber, to shoot an arrow in the direction of Aphek. This was a frontier-town, near the eastern shores of the Lake of Galilee,

where the Syrian army were then encamped. Before, however, the arrow is discharged, the prophet puts his withered hands over the hand of the king, aiding him in drawing the bow; forth flies the feathered weapon in the direction of the foes of Israel, the aged Seer adding—“*The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them.*”

Nor was this all. After the flight of the arrow, Elisha told him to take the remaining contents of the quiver, and “*smite the ground with them.*” This Joash did three times only. The prophet, displeased at his want of faith, tells him that, instead of a series of victories ending in complete triumph, the armies of Israel should only have three successful battles with their old adversary. It seemed to have been the old man's expiring act. The accounts of his death and sepulture immediately follow.

There are many instructive reflections suggested by this incident.

The prophet seeks to leave the world, impressing on his sovereign and his people the great truth, that the hand of the Lord can alone give deliverance from any enemy. He was now as God's vicegerent, speaking and acting in the name of the God he served. When he laid his wrinkled hands over those of Joash, it was to proclaim by an expressive symbol, “If that arrow prove an arrow of deliverance, it is because the Lord's hand and might have been with the bowmen. If the Syrians be routed, as routed they shall be, give Him all the glory. In every military project and campaign, look to Him for direction and victory.”

The king had just spoken, in the ears of the prophet, of the "chariots and the horsemen of Israel." Elisha's reply was in the spirit, at least, of another noble Hebrew. "*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,*" but remember ye "*the name of the Lord your God.*" "*Blessed be THE LORD, who teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight.*"*

But we cannot think that in this dying, symbolic act, there were no spiritual lessons for the Church of God and for every believer in every age.

Mightier adversaries than the Syrians are around us;—invisible spiritual enemies, "whose name is Legion, for they are many." God would impress upon us, alike in our spiritual conflicts and spiritual advancements, our dependence on *Him*;—that if we ever reach the heavenly inheritance, this will be our confession on our every retrospect of the earthly battle-field:—"We got not possession of the land by our own sword, neither did our own arm save us. But thy right hand and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto us." It is the good hand of our God being upon us—His hands "over-laying" ours—that gives power and direction to every arrow, whether of conviction, or deliverance, or comfort. "*Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name we would give glory.*" "*By the grace of God we are what we are.*" But while all this is true, He would at the same time teach us here a great counterpart truth, viz., that He works by *means*. He tells us to "*take bow and arrow.*" What are these? It is *the bow of FAITH* and *the arrow of PRAYER!* and the direction to us, as to Joash, is "*shoot.*" Prayer is the arrow

* Ps. xx. 7, cxliv. 1.

of deliverance. Christ himself has strung it. He has, like Elisha, put his hand on ours, declaring, "*Believe, only believe.*" "*All things are possible to him that believeth.*" "*Whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you.*" Alas! that, like Joash, we should "limit the Holy One of Israel," that we should get "weary of smiting," and thus cheat ourselves of the promised blessing. We do not empty our quivers. We "smite the ground" with a feeble, irresolute hand. We ask with the half-hearted faith of those who think that the Lord's hand is "shortened that it cannot save." We think we do enough when we have "smitten thrice and then stayed."

As with Israel's king, unbelief is the guilty cause of all these religious failures and declensions,—these shortcomings and defects. When our enemies smite us and vanquish us, let us blame ourselves—not Him, whom we have displeased by our want of faith. We refuse to take God at His word. We controvert and gainsay His commands by our carnal reasonings. "What" (that proud young monarch might say to himself)—"what the need of these silly repetitions;—dashing these arrows on the clay floor of this dwelling? I understand the significancy of the arrow of deliverance which sped a little ago from the eastward window, but this 'smiting on the ground' is a meaningless act. I shall (to please the old Seer) go the length of casting three arrows on the floor, but I shall submit to no more."

What a picture of ourselves! We stop short in the means of gaining spiritual conquests, just when a little more faith, prayer, courage, self-sacrifice, trust in God, might have won the day, and given us victory. It is the case with thousands

on thousands, that they go a certain length in well-doing, and then they cease. They are content with languid, fitful efforts. They lop off a few branches and leave the old root to throw out fresh shoots. They stop half way up "the Hill Difficulty." They go half way through the torrent, manfully breasting and buffeting it, and then sink. Their religion is not the work of men in earnest. After a few victories over master sins, a few dominant lusts subdued, they leave unvanquished corruptions to levy a new army on the side of evil. The tide washes out all their good resolutions, and "*the last state of that man is worse than the first.*" Oh that we knew, and realised, and acted out, the power of *believing* prayer and *persevering* prayer;—that great truth which Christ inculcated and illustrated by no less than two parables, that "men ought *always* to pray and not to faint."*

It must be *believing* prayer. "*I will direct my prayer to thee,*" says David, "*and will look up.*" † And so it is with the true Christian. Prayer with him is not an empty form. "He knows he will have the petitions desired of God." He "directs" his supplication, and "looks up" for the descent of the promised blessing, saying, "*Do as thou hast said.*" ‡

It must also be *persevering* prayer. Let us not cease to smite the ground with Heaven's own winged arrows, when Christ says, "Smite on." Paul, in his Christian-armoury-chapter, in naming this "arrow of deliverance," most specially reminds us never to desist till our quiver be exhausted,—"*Praying always,*" says he, "*with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all persever-*

* Luke xviii. 1.

† Ps. v. 3.

‡ 1 Chron. xvii. 23.

ance and supplication for all saints."* Beware of distrusting and dishonouring God,—becoming languid and indifferent, —“the hands hanging down and the knees feeble;” and that, too, in the best period of your lives, when you have health and strength to serve Him;—keeping back “the arrows of the mighty” when your hand is best able to grasp the bow. If you neglect to draw it now, when your arm is strong, and God is guiding you, what will you do when the arm is feeble, —“when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves?”—“*If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?*” †

One other point still remains—*the lessons from the sick-bed of the prophet.*

The comparison has often and again been suggested (and the contrast is a striking one) between the departure of Elisha and that of Elijah. Both are characters truly great; each possessing their peculiar lineaments of greatness and grandeur. But while Elijah is unquestionably the more brilliant and dazzling of the two, encircled with a halo of moral chivalry, which his successor does not, at least to the same extent, share, we think (as we have already indicated) that the purer, godlier life belonged to Elisha.

Why then so startling a difference in the manner in which they bade adieu to the earth they had gladdened with their presence? Why was there given to Elijah the brilliant equipage, “the chariot of fire and the horses of fire?”

* Eph. vi. 18.

† Jer. xii. 5.

Why to him give immunity from pain and suffering, from the langour and decay of sinking nature, the decrepitude of age, the pangs of a sick-bed? why spare him all these, and, in the glory of his manhood, when the laurels were green on his brow, and his eye undimmed, send him majestically up to heaven on the wings of the whirlwind; while the saintlier man—the man of more even walk—more consistent life and rarer goodness, is suffered to waste away by sickness in the secluded home of his old age? From the peculiar expression, “Now Elisha was *fallen sick of the sickness* whereof he died,” we are led to conjecture that his was no brief illness;—but that the aged prophet may rather have been “made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights were appointed him, full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day.” Many *require* such discipline and chastisement,—but he needed, apparently, no such polishing for his crown, no such furnace to refine him; he needed to give no further testimony (for his life was already an eloquent evidence) that “*he pleased God.*” Why, then, we again ask, was it not with him as with Elijah? Why did not the fiery coursers come down to *his* cottage home too at Gilgal, and save him these long days of weakness and suffering?

It might be enough for us to answer, “*The Lord willed it so!*” But we generally find that God has a reason for all He does—that He acts on great principles. There is nothing capricious in His dealings—nothing accidental even in His appointments regarding a sick-bed.

And we may the more readily speak of this contrast between the departures of the two great prophets of their age,

because it is a contrast constantly occurring still in the diverse experiences of believers. Some are surrounded with a halo of brightness to the last;—others are laid low in the midst of public usefulness—chained, for years on years, to a couch of languishing—the dim lamp of life flickering long in its socket, till the flame of wasted nature expires.

Let us learn, from the contrasted cases of Elijah and Elisha, that *God adapts His dealings to the different characters of His people*. He knows exactly what they can best bear. He knows how they can best glorify Him. "*He stays his rough wind in the day of his east wind.*" He "*tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.*" *Elijah*, that spirit of the storm—bold, manly, full of zeal for his God and his nation;—yet by natural temperament, rash, impulsive—and if severely tried, fretful and irritable;—with a hero-heart—one day up amid the frantic crowd on Mount Carmel—the next hiding amid the clefts of the Sinai desert, away from life and its great mission;—though God's grace, indeed, could have braced him up for anything, yet (judging on ordinary grounds) he would not have been well fitted to stand the wasting ordeal of a prolonged sickness. *He glorified his God too*,—but it was, as with David's lion-like men of a former age, by brilliant but fitful feats of moral championship. Act after act of his life was too often like wave upon wave dashing proudly in succession on the rock, but retreating again to hide the chafed foam in the porous sands. We can hardly picture to ourselves this Gilead chief—the Bedouin of his age—laid for years on years in some lone cottage of Israel—the fire of his noble spirit burning slowly out. It would have been like Samson chafing in his dun-

geon, but unable, like Samson, by the Divine sanction and by a brilliant deed, to terminate his humiliation. And therefore God, (knowing the constitutional temperament of His favoured and devoted servant) prepares for him rather the glorious translation. He uses him in another way, to give testimony to the doctrine of the resurrection;—and without one moment's pang—one day's experience of suffering or sickness—the eddying whirlwind and the fiery coursers bear him away as in a car of victory to the gates of glory!

Not so Elisha. The Lord who trieth all hearts, knows that He can get another revenue of glory from this holy man, in addition to what he had already rendered, in his public character, during the day of health and manly vigour. He will not carry him off while he is yet in his prime;—He allows the lengthening shadows of age to creep upon him;—He whitens his brow with the snows of fourscore winters;—He takes him to a lowly home of obscurity, there lays him on a sick-bed—and He would have him preach to all Israel, and to us too, by these days of passive endurance and suffering, as well as by his former life of stern work and active and laborious duty.

Let no one say that a man is unable to serve and glorify his God in a home of obscurity or on a couch of prolonged and hopeless distress. We go to Elisha's sick-chamber for the refutation. True—we are told little (we are told nothing) as to how he bore his trouble. There is no positive record of his patience and endurance, his calm and childlike submission in this season of illness. But we gather, at all events, that he lived through his sickness as he had lived through his health,—a man of God—a man of faith,—with a

soul glowing with high patriotism, which the pangs of a death-couch could not quench! If sickness and trouble had soured and irritated him,—he would have turned his back when he heard these royal footsteps—he would have mocked and scorned these royal tears. Thinking nothing but of himself, and thinking hardly of his God, he would have said, in the peevish mood of Elijah, “*It is enough; take away my life!*” How different! Grand it is to see this feeble, decrepit Sage, racked with the pains of approaching death, raising himself up to deliver, with patriot lip, a message of peace to Israel. Like a great dying hero of our own, he would not compose his head on its last pillow, till “*victory*” was borne to his ears amid the shout and shell of battle.

Thus, then, we deduce the lesson, that God will adapt His dealings to our varied temperaments and capacities of endurance. He suits the soldier to the place, and the place to the soldier. He will send us no temptation or trial, which He knows we are unable to bear. Look at the deaths which are constantly occurring around us—some swept away like Elijah, suddenly in a moment, “as a dream when one awaketh;”—others, in the delirium of fever, saving them mercifully the bondage-fear of dissolution; and with a glorious surprise opening their eyes in heaven. To others, He appoints the slow process of wasting and decay—transfigured on the Mount of Suffering before being glorified—the light of heavenly peace shining through the chinks of their “earthly tabernacle” before it is finally “dissolved!” But all is His appointment. It is not for us to question, in these varied experiences,—“*Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*” “*Where is the Lord God of Elisha?*”

We may learn more than this—whether, in the case of ourselves, when visited with future, unforeseen, protracted sickness, or in that of some near and dear to us, who may now be laid on couches of anguish and suffering. Let us never think that we or they are useless to the world;—cast as weeds and wrack on the desert shore,—unable to glorify our God.

Nay, far from it. There is no grander pulpit than a sick-bed;—no more impressive preacher than that weak and languid sufferer who has for years on years been familiar with no more cheerful vision than the obscured light creeping through the shaded windows, no sound but the suppressed footfall or whisper of affection. Ah, it is often easier to be an Elijah than an Elisha. It is often easier to mount the steeps of Carmel, to pronounce maledictions on transgressors, and make the river Kishon run with blood;—to confront an Ahab, and dare a royal frown, than, lying low under the Divine hand, with meek, gentle, kind, loving spirit, to say, “*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*” * And be assured, God does not (like man) measure character or deeds by their greatness and lustre. When man’s eye is on some brilliant action;—or some display of boasted munificence,—*His* may be on the unselfish kindness, the unostentatious deed of lowly beneficence, the humble trust of the widow in the widow’s God;—the pining sufferer, amid long years of anguish, giving forth no utterance but ONE—“*Even so, Father, for so it seems good in Thy sight.*”

And *was* Elisha’s prolonged life of weakness,—*was* his sick-bed unproductive of glory to the God he served, and of

* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

good to the people he loved? Go! (after that noble old hero-prophet is sleeping in his grave)—go north amid the glens of Gilead, where the army of Israel is reposing after a day's bloody conflict with Syria, and hear how they connect the last act of that palsied arm with the victory they had achieved! The Syrians have fled from Aphek, and Israel is triumphant. But it was the old prophet's symbolic "arrow" which that day inspired every bowman and spearman with indomitable valour. The voice of the dead has led them on to victory! Tears may well flow afresh down the cheeks of Joash as he sees the tide of conflict setting in his favour. He may well turn the old panegyric into a battle-cry, and shout over the prophet's ashes, as he had done over his death-pillow,—"*My father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!*"

God, moreover, would not suffer His servant, who had glorified Him so faithfully in his life and in his death—He would not suffer him to pass to his sepulchre without a fresh attestation to the words, "*Them that honour me I will honour.*" The historical narrative further narrates, how a dead body, that was cast into the prophet's tomb to secrete it from a band of Moab marauders or bandits, on touching the bones of the buried Seer, started into life. It was an exception to the great truth, "*The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.*" Here was one who *did* praise Him; praised Him in life, and praised Him after he descended into the tomb.

Come, and learn from all this, not only that you can honour God in old age, in sickness, in suffering, in obscurity, ay, in the very valley of death, but (by an expressive allegory—a

miraculous figure in the vivifying of this body by contact with the bones of Elisha) you are taught that your influence can survive dissolution,—that there may be a power in the holy memories of your life and example, which may kindle new aspirations in others when your own tongues are silenced! Ah! it is a mighty theme this of posthumous influence. While you gather round the sick-bed of Elijah, and learn its lessons, gather around his grave. See that dead corpse touching his bones, and learn the lessons *it*, too, conveys. Shall *our* graves and sepulchres wake up some dormant fount of life? Shall the arrow of deliverance which speeds from *our* living hand, enter into some heart when the hand that sped it is mouldering in the tomb? If we, when dead, are thus to speak, remember, our speech will be the echoes of the *present*. What we shall say *then*, is what we *are* now! Stupendous thought! glorious privilege! We envy not Elijah his burnished chariot-wheels and majestic whirlwind. We will cheerfully, if God see meet, lie down with Elisha in his humble couch and lowly sepulchre,—if we are better able thereby to quicken by our example, and animate by our faith.

Spirit of God! breathe upon the dry bones that they may live! If now, the memories of the departed come hovering over us,—their virtues in living, their submission in trial, their peace in dying,—let us touch their ashes;—let the dead speak;—let them meet in the affirmative the challenge of the Psalmist,—“*Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?*”

XI.

A Dark Day and a Bright Sunset.

“How fair has the day been, how bright was the sun,
How lovely and joyful the course that he run!
Though he rose in a mist, when his race he begun,
 And there follow'd some droppings of rain:
But now as the traveller comes to the west,
His rays are all gold, and his beauties are best,—
He paints the sky gay as he sinks to his rest,
 And foretells a bright rising again.

“And such the believer! his course he begins,
Like the sun in a mist, when he mourns for his sins,
And melts into tears; then he breaks out and shines,
 And travels his heavenly way:
But when he comes nearer to finish his race,
Like a bright setting sun, he looks richer in grace,
And gives a sure hope, at the end of his days,
 Of rising in brighter array.”

—ISAAC WATTS.

“Now the rest of the acts of MANASSEH, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.”—2 KINGS xxi. 17, 18.

2 CHRON. xxxiii. 1-21.

A DARK DAY AND A BRIGHT SUNSET.

HERE is an unostentatious, an unhonoured, an unepitaphed grave! Though one of the kings of Judah, MANASSEH is laid, not in pomp and splendour, amid the dust of his ancestors, but in a private tomb, in the garden of his Jerusalem palace.

Striking is the contrast between these obsequies of Manasseh and those of his royal father Hezekiah. The funeral cortege and burial of the latter was one of unprecedented splendour. "*They buried him,*" we read, "*in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death.*"* But however brief be the chronicle of Manasseh's departure and funeral, however lowly or unregal the mausoleum or cenotaph reared over his ashes, he is himself a wondrous "*monument,*"—a monument of Divine grace and mercy and forgiveness. As we gather around his tomb, let us ponder the spiritual epitaph for ourselves, which many have read through tears of guilt and despair, thanking God and taking courage,—"*The chief of sinners, BUT I obtained mercy!*"

We have to trace, in his case, as described in the motto-lines of the Christian poet, a "sunrise" of promise, soon obscured with clouds of guilt and crime. These clouds burst in floods of penitence and sorrow. A meridian of sudden brilliancy succeeds. The sky clears, and the orb of

* 1 Chron. xxxii. 33.

a chequered life sets cloudless and serene on the hills of Judah. Standing by his grave, under the shadow of Zion, let us take a retrospective view of his strange history. He is the prodigal son of Old Testament story. We have the departure from the hallowed parental home; the life of alienation, misery, and sin, and his final restoration and return. In other words, let us consider, in their order, these three points—Manasseh's *sin*; his *conversion*; and his *new life*.

I. His career of sin was a peculiarly sad one; and all the more so, when we reflect that his infancy and boyhood were nurtured under the training of the best and holiest of fathers. Hezekiah, when he received the respite from sickness and expected death, was divinely apprised that fifteen additional years would be added to his life; and it was three years subsequent to this, that Manasseh was born. With the precise knowledge which the good king of Judah thus possessed as to the assigned limit of existence, (a knowledge vouchsafed indeed to none else,) and knowing, moreover, how susceptible youth is of lasting impressions, we may well imagine, as year by year drew nigh when the crown would devolve on the head of his young boy, how faithfully he would employ the brief allotted period in training him for his great duties; infesting him in that noblest of inheritances, a father's piety and devout example. How zealously would he echo the dying exhortation and benediction of his great progenitor, "*And thou, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all*

the imaginations of the thoughts : if thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."* Above all, how would Hezekiah (man of special prayer as he was) baptize that child's infancy and youth with these burning devotions,—these earnest petitions, which, mightier than all his armies, had laid the proud chivalry of Sennacherib low in the dust.

But ah ! we are too truthfully, too painfully reminded, in the case of Manasseh, that grace is not hereditary ; that piety, despite of the most devout and religious training, is not always transmitted from sire to son. To take an older illustration ; Adam, with all the recollections fresh on his memory of Eden lost, the galling bitterness of forfeited bliss, would doubtless oft and again rehearse in the ears of his children the dark story of transgression. He would paint to them, as he alone of all the human race *could* do, the unsullied beauties of holiness, in order to scare them from that accursed thing which had entailed upon himself so terrible a ruin ! Yet what was his success ? What effect had these blinding tears of penitence and remorse, shed before his children at the very gates of the lost paradise ? His own first-born, despite of all, turned out a murderer and a vagabond. And here, in a later age, we have another child of prayers and tears, scarce mounting the throne still fragrant with parental piety, ere he insults a parent's ashes, tramples on his counsels, mocks his tears, and becomes a desperado in guilt. Altars to Baalim and Ashtaroth were erected within the Temple's sacred enclosures. The groves in the valley of Jehoshaphat and on the slopes of the Mount

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

of Olives were polluted with defiled altars, on which incense rose to the host of heaven. Deep down in the valley of Hinnom, behind his palace, he caused his own son to pass through the fire, dedicating him a votary to bloodthirsty Moloch. With servile credulity, while he rejected the God of his fathers, he listened to lying oracles, and did homage to those who pretended intercourse with familiar spirits. Proud, passionate, overbearing, he became the persecutor and fanatic of his day. He poured out the blood of Jerusalem like water. Innocent lives were sacrificed. Those who loved the God and the religion of their fathers better than existence, were given over to massacre. Cruelty and torture were added to death; and tradition has it, that good old Isaiah was, at the savage command of the royal master whom he had too faithfully reprov'd, ordered to be "sawn asunder." "*He wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.*"*

Nor was his guilt and ruin confined to himself. There is a terrible contagion in moral evil. We read that "*He made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to sin, and to do worse than the heathen whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.*"† This tells the baneful influence his creed and example had on his subjects;—that he sowed broadcast the seeds of his own wickedness among the thousands that owned his sway.

It is an awful and solemn thought, continually recurring to us in these Bible characters, that individual influence assumes greater and more responsible proportions according to position or scale in society. The influence of

* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 6.

† 2 Chron. v. 9.

mind upon mind, and especially of those in exalted position, is truly gigantic,—the magnetic power of moral attraction or repulsion. It is often said that “the age makes the man.” We believe that the converse is oftener true, that “the man makes the age.” At the close of last century, in France and England, there was, in high places, a galaxy of great and commanding intellect. In France, the infidelity of a few, gave the first impulse to that wild wave of moral ruin which is chafing and eddying there to this day. Simultaneously in England, a number of influential minds appeared in prominent positions. *They* cast their talents and influence as trophies at the foot of the cross. But while they themselves are gone;—long slumbering beneath the storied urns which a nation delighted to rear over their honoured ashes,—the seed wafted from these Trees of righteousness is this day springing up, in a forest of holy influences, to the praise and the glory of God.

So it was with Hezekiah and Manasseh. In the case of the former, how marvellous the influence for good. How his own faith and piety were reflected in the hearts of his people. Look at that memorable instance to which we have already incidentally referred, when Sennacherib and his giant host came up against Jerusalem and the fenced cities of Judah. It was enough to strike panic and dismay into the boldest and bravest. But Hezekiah, undismayed, because he knew where his true strength lay, gathered together his soldiers and captains of war in the open street, and thus addressed them:—“*Be strong and courageous; be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him.*”

With him is an arm of flesh : but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight our battles. AND," it is added, "THE PEOPLE RESTED THEMSELVES UPON THE WORDS OF HEZEKIAH, KING OF JUDAH." *

See, on the other hand, in the case of Manasseh, the influence for evil ; and that, too, long after he had mourned his sins, with breaking heart, and sought repentance carefully and with tears. Ay, it was an influence that survived his death, and bore bitter fruit after he himself was laid in his grave, when his own son perpetuated the idolatries of his father's earlier years ; for we read, "*Amon, his son, sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them.*"

Let us never forget, each of us, our solemn individual influence ; an influence, too, not confined to place or time, but made up of words and deeds that transmit their endless echoes and images from age to age ;—giving us very life when we are dead—putting speech into our ashes. After the stone is sunk in the quiet lake, and lying still in the bottom, the waves generated by it, are being propelled in concentric circlets to the shore. They are chafing and rippling on the pebbles, when the disturbing cause has been for many minutes lost to sight, and buried in unconscious rest in the underlying bed of sand or mud. When we are sunk in our last long rest, lost from the sight and from the land of the living,—“gone down into silence,”—the ripple of influence, for good or for evil, will be heard murmuring on the shores of Time!

Note again, as an aggravation of Manasseh's sin, *his repeated and obdurate rejection of Divine warning.* “*The*

* 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.

Lord spake to Manasseh and his people, but they would not hearken."*

He may have spoken to him as He does to us, in varied ways. He may have spoken to him by *blessings*. He may have sent His holy prophets and seers to expostulate with him. He may have knocked at the door of his seared conscience by the hallowed remembrances of a parent's piety, and a youth of rare spiritual privilege. But it was all in vain. And now He prepares the rod for severer punishment. He makes ready the bow, and puts the arrow on the string, to send the dart of deeper conviction home to his heart! Let us here admire God's patience and forbearance with this guilty, daring, aggravated apostate. He might have cut him down in a moment;—He might have commissioned the lightning from heaven, or the pangs of some sudden disease, or the hand of righteous violence, to rid the nation of a villain. He might have sent him out, like Ahab, in his chariot to battle; and some bowman might have drawn his arrow at a venture, and sent him reeling to a grave of despair! But, no. Manasseh's name is in the Book of Life. He is one of God's chosen ones from before the foundation of the world; that lost sheep must be brought home to the fold—that lost son must be brought to the paternal halls. "*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help found.*" †

And how does God deal with this self-destroyer? What are the means He employs to humble his hard heart, and evoke from the wretched prodigal the cry, "*I will arise, and go to my Father.*" He sends one of the generals of Esar-

* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 10.

† Hosea xiii. 9.

haddon, the king of Assyria, against him and his fenced cities. The panic-stricken monarch presents a painful and humiliating contrast with the brave, bold heart of Hezekiah. The latter, when the same hosts were encamped against him at his very gates, led his men up the temple steps, singing, as they marched, his own sublime psalm, written for the occasion,—“*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.*” * His son, without, perhaps, the shadow of resistance, flees humiliated from his palace, and takes shelter in a brake or copse of thorns to elude the fury of the invader. But the commissioners of the Divine vengeance track out his guilty footsteps. He is loaded with chains, marched in ignominy to Babylon, and consigned there to a dungeon-vault. What a comment on the striking parallel made by the wise man—“*The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion!*” †

II. Let us consider next, Manasseh's *conversion*;—the great turning point in his history. That dungeon became to him as the gate of heaven. His God, in a far higher than natural sense, “*brought him out of darkness and the shadow of death. He broke the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.*” ‡

We are called to note here the power of sanctified affliction.

* Ps. xlv. 1–3.

† Prov. xxviii. 1.

‡ Ps. cvii. 14–16.

There is a twofold effect of trial and adversity. Sometimes it hardens the heart, leading a rebellious spirit to murmur and repine under the hand that chastens, and to say, like Gideon, "*If the Lord be with us, why has all this befallen us?*" or to utter the worse infidel scoff, "*Let me curse God, and die.*" But it has another effect,—the more blessed one, of humbling the rebellious spirit, bringing it to consider its ways, bewail its sins, and, instead of kicking against the pricks, to cry, "*Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?*"

It was so with Manasseh. In that dungeon, God knocked at the door of his obdurate heart. The prison in Babylon became his spiritual birthplace. "*Behold, he prayeth!*" Knees that never bent before the God of his fathers, since he knelt a child by his parents' side, are now bent on that dungeon floor!

We can imagine his exercise of soul. How, in that solemn, silent prison, the memory of years on years of past sin would rise up before him. His father's prayers and saintly counsels;—the innocent blood he shed in Jerusalem;—the terrible desecration of the holy place;—the thousands he had involved, by his guilty example, in apostasy and ruin! Oh, as the rush of the past came on his lonely spirit, in the midnight hour, and the tears of burning remorse and shame rolled down his cheeks, would not *this* be his despairing thought—Can iniquities such as mine be pardoned? Can there be forgiveness for such aggravated transgression—such unparalleled, presumptuous sin? Who knows but, as the vision of the holy prophet he had slain rose up before him, adding a new scorpion sting to his agonised conscience—who knows but at the same moment, balm-words of comfort which that prophet

had spoken may have fallen on his tossed soul like oil on the troubled waters. Did they not seem to speak home to *him*, as if the seer, in uttering them, had his own case of agonising despair specially in view—“*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*” * “Scarlet and crimson,” indeed, his sins were. But he will take the God of his fathers, the God who had borne with him so long and so patiently, at His word—“*When he was in affliction,*” we read, “*he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.*” † God heard the voice of his groaning. A light, brighter than the sun, broke through his prison bars. He could say with Jeremiah in *his* dungeon, “*I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee. Thou saidst, Fear not!*” ‡ Perhaps one of his bitterest and saddest thoughts may have been that same terrible influence, already alluded to, which he had exerted, in the past, over his subjects. This thought, in that moment of penitence and illumination, may have been uppermost in his spirit, and hardest to bear:—“*Oh, that I could undo that guilty past! Oh, that God would spare me to recover strength, and bring me back again to my palace and capital, that I might declare what He hath done for my soul, and seek to counteract these memories of blood-guiltiness and sin!*” God *did* hear him in this matter too; for “*he prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem, into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that*

* Isa. i. 18.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.

‡ Lam. iii. 55.

the Lord he was God” * He left Jerusalem bound (soul and body) in fetters, after having closed on himself and his people the temple-gates, and quenched the sacred fire on his fathers’ altars. Now he returns, the possessor of a nobler liberty than he ever before enjoyed, saying, “*Open unto me the gates of righteousness; then will I enter into them and praise the Lord.*” “*O Lord, truly I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.*” †

Does not all this teach us, that God’s grace can reach any heart, in any place? The soul that contemned God in the consecrated ground of Canaan and Jerusalem, was reached in the heathen city, and in the military prison in heathen Babylon. Prayer, too, needs no sacred places,—no high altar,—no temple-court,—no fretted aisle or gorgeous cathedral to give it power and efficacy. Wherever there is an earnest heart, there is a present God. The prayer of Saul of Tarsus in heathen Damascus, or when tossed at midnight on the sea of Adria, or when immured in the dungeons of Philippi; and the prayer of Manasseh, here narrated, in this dungeon-keep in Babylon—*these*, and similar penitential cries of earnest, broken spirits are heard, when many an imposing service and intoned liturgy dies away in empty echoes within “consecrated walls!”

And mark what was the instrumental cause of Manasseh’s conversion. What was it that drove him to his knees, and led

* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 13.

† Ps. cxvi. 16-19.

him to know God as the hearer of prayer? It was "*when he was in affliction* he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself." It is Manasseh, "taken among the thorns, and bound with fetters," who stands before us a new man!

And is not affliction still God's own angel-messenger?

Does not He still drive His own people amid the thorny brakes of severe trial,—hurl them from their thrones of prosperity, and immure them "in darkness and in the deeps,"—just that He may dash to pieces all their earthly confidences, break their hard, stubborn hearts, send them to their knees, and save their souls?

Ah, how many can tell, "*But for these thorn-brakes, these fetters of trial, I would still have been an enemy to my God, plunging into greater and greater sin? But I may well take these thorns and chains together, and weave them into a garland of triumph.*" It is said that the mother eagle inserts a thorn in the nest, to drive her young brood to the wing. God puts many a thorn in His people's downy nest of ease and worldly prosperity, to urge them to rise heavenward. If Manasseh had not known the thorns, the fetters, and the dark prison, in all human probability, he had lived and died an idolater. If Moab had not been "emptied from vessel to vessel" he would have "settled on his lees." If many of the redeemed, spoken of in Revelation, had not "*come out of great tribulation*" they would not have been in their white robes "before the throne!"

III. Let us now proceed to consider Manasseh's *new life*.

The grand test of the reality of conversion, is the regenerated being. The tree is known by its fruits. The purified

fountain is known by its streams. With many, alas! returning prosperity only hardens the heart, causing it to lapse into its old state of callous indifference.

It might have been so with Manasseh when the dungeon-vault was left, and when, under a royal escort, he was once more conducted back to his palace and crown. He might have basely spurned the hand that rescued him, and relapsed into his old courses. But he stood the test. We read that it was WHEN God had brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom, "THEN *Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God.*"

It must have been a noble sight, to see him, in the face of his whole people, not only manifesting the saving change in his own heart and life, but as all true religion is expansive, and seeks the good of others, commencing at once religious and civil, ecclesiastical and political, reform. He began by cutting down, root and branch, all his old abominations. The statues of Ashtaroth,—the heathen groves,—the defiled altars,—all are swept away. Nor was it a mere external reformation,—a mere negative religion,—the "ceasing to do evil." But he taught himself, and he taught his people, "to do well." "*He repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings.*" Offerings for sin, and offerings of gratitude for mercies. He became himself a preacher of righteousness. It was a great revival in Judah. "He stood by the altar, and" we read, "commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." He evidently returned in the spirit of Zaccheus the publican, resolved to "restore four-fold;" saying, "*What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*"

Strange but joyous sight to the true Israel of God in

Jerusalem—those who for years had wept in secret over their monarch's sins, and over "the holy and beautiful house where their fathers worshipped"—to behold now the long-smouldering ashes again kindled on the altar for the morning and evening sacrifice,—the king's own voice joining in the solemn hymn, "*Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever.*"

Add to all this, and as a proof that worldly wisdom and prudence, in the best sense of the word, go hand in hand with true piety, he set himself with equal vigour to the strengthening of his kingdom. He reared a wall on the defenceless side of his capital, besides augmenting the strongholds of his fenced cities. He was more a king than ever. All his praying, and praising, and temple-worship, had made him no fatalist, no presumptuous dreamer. It was no creed of his—"God will save us; we need not trouble ourselves about defence or munitions,—walls or standing armies, horses or chariots,—the Lord will fight our battles!" No! his piety served only to invigorate his patriotism. He acted out the truth of that grand apostolic maxim, "*Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*"

True piety requires us not to sink into sentimental devotion,—a dreamy life of inaction or enthusiasm,—but to interfuse all worldly work with religion;—to let life's duties be saturated with the fear of God;—erecting our churches, yet building our dockyards;—rearing our altars, yet casting our cannon;—letting the white wings of commerce be studding our seas, and bringing back laden stores from distant continents, yet sending, at the same time, to heaven the winged vessels of prayer;—waiting in faith for their return, laden

with costlier merchandise;—taking religion and incorporating it with daily life,—letting it regulate our transactions behind the counter, in the exchange, in the family, in the world, and proving to all the truth of that noble aphorism—“A Christian is the highest style of *man*.”

We may conclude this chapter with a word of *warning*, and a word of *encouragement*.

The word of *warning* may be read from the consequences of Manasseh's guilt:—

He was a penitent, a sincere penitent. His aggravated sins were all pardoned and forgiven, and he afterwards lived and died, a true “Hebrew of the Hebrews,” an “heir of promise.” But the deadly influence of his early life of sin, was not so easily obliterated. We have already casually alluded to the fact, and return to it once more. If you read the sequel to his brief history, you will find that with all his efforts and zeal, he could only at best effect a partial reformation. He found that personal repentance was an easier thing than national;—that it was easier far, in the earlier part of his reign, to undo the effect of his father's virtues, than in the latter part, to undo his own crimes. “*Nevertheless*,” we read, “*the people did sacrifice still in the high places.*” Ah! how it would embitter his closing days to see, here and there, polluted incense still rising from unhallowed groves and altars, and the trumpet of vengeance sounding its retributive note in his ear,—“*Be sure your sin will find you out!*” Even in his own private funeral obsequies and secluded tomb, we can see a fruit of his early sin. By his reformation, and return to the worship of his father's God, he had alienated the

companions of his guilt and the abettors of his idolatrous practices. Those, on the other hand, who gladly hailed his change of mind, would be slow, as is generally the case, to credit the reality; and even if certified of this, they could never heartily forgive, or at least forget, the murderer of their fathers or mothers or children. Dying, therefore, though he did, a believer—a true child of Abraham—many tears did not follow him to the grave, nor did willing hands rear a monument to his memory; moreover, he himself, painfully aware how his inconsistent former life had compromised him in the eyes of his people, might forbid the funeral pomp usually accompanying royal obsequies. With no feigned humility, he had probably, as the shedder of the blood of God's prophets, pronounced his ashes unworthy to mix with that of his nobler ancestry, and on his death-bed given instructions that his interment might take place within the precincts of his own garden.

Reader, beware of sin. Think of the bitter consequences it entails,—how by unholy acts or inconsistent deeds, influence is lessened or character lost. Avoid debateable ground. Keep off from what is likely to compromise you. Remember righteous Lot. He made little after all of the rich plains of Sodom and its luxurious capital. Men pointed at him with the finger of scorn. Dark stains blotted the close of his life. Even in the case of Manasseh, with a nobler and more consistent termination to existence (many years, as we may surmise, of devotedness to the God of Israel),—yet it was easier for men to remember Manasseh the infidel, the scoffer, the profligate, the persecutor, the reckless prodigal,—than Manasseh the converted, the royal penitent, the prodigal restored, the wondrous monument of divine grace and mercy!

But we have also, as we watch this singular "sunset," a lesson of *encouragement*.

We have a glorious testimony, in the case of Manasseh, that no sinner need despair. He is now stooping over the walls of heaven, in company with Saul the blasphemer, Zaccheus the extortioner, the Magdalene of the Pharisee's house, the dying felon of Calvary, and proclaiming that, for the vilest sinner, there is mercy. Yes, although this man had defied his God; had scorned pious counsels; had added bloodshed and cruelty to rampant unbelief and lawless lust;—yet when the blast of God's trumpet sounded over the apparently impregnable citadel of his heart, it fell to the dust; and from that hour, in which grace triumphed, its walls became "salvation and its gates praise."

And that grace which saved Manasseh, can save every one of us,—the poorest, the vilest, the most desponding.

Is there one such whose eye traces these pages;—some one whose whole past life is one sad foul retrospect,—a story of aggravated guilt and impiety,—a father's counsels, a mother's prayers, mocked and scorned;—deep, dark stains blotting every page of conscience and memory? Have God's bowmen of conviction found you in the thorns? Have they dragged you to some dungeon of despair, and left you, amid the darkness of its rayless vaults, to brood over impending death? Oh! send up your cry for mercy to Manasseh's God. HE will not scorn you. No; though you have scorned *Him*, scorned His people, scorned His mercies, scorned His afflictions, scorned His providence, scorned His ministers, yet *He* will not scorn *you*. "*He will regard the cry of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer.*" This story of

Manasseh has been "*written for the generations to come, that the people which shall be created may praise the Lord.*"*

And is there no special encouragement here to Christian parents? We have alluded, more than once, to Manasseh scorning his father's piety and prayers. We have spoken of good Hezekiah, as his end approached, imbuing that young heart with these prayers, pouring on that young kingly brow this best anointing oil. Alas! is it another case on which to found the sneer of the infidel?—"What need is there of prayer? Here is another testimony that the prayer of pious lips ascends in vain. Hezekiah prays. But the heavens are as brass and the earth as iron. The Lord has 'not heard,' the 'God of Jacob has not regarded.' This child of prayer grows up a daring and defiant unbeliever. 'Is there a God on the earth?'"

Nay, O man; who art thou that repliest against God? Hezekiah's prayer is heard. His cries have not entered in vain into the ears of the God of Sabaoth. "*The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*"† Years upon years—half a lifetime—had elapsed,—since the arrow of prayer had sped from Hezekiah's bow. But when the good old king is sleeping his deep sleep, in the regal sepulchre on Zion, lo! in yonder far-off dungeon, washed by the tide of the distant Euphrates, the arrow *has* reached its mark; the word of the Lord is tried;—"Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days."‡

* Ps. cii. 18.

† Hab. ii. 3.

‡ Ec. xi. 1.

Sunset on Mount Moriah.

"He said,
 In falt'ring accents, to the weeping train.
 'Why mourn ye that our aged friend is dead?
 Ye are not sad to see the gather'd grain,
 Nor when the mellow fruit the orchards cast,
 Nor when the yellow woods shake down their ripen'd **mast**.

"Ye sigh not when the sun—his course fulfill'd,
 His glorious course, rejoicing earth and sky—
 In the soft evening, when the winds are still'd,
 Sinks where the islands of refreshment lie,
 And leaves the smile of his departure spread
 O'er the warm-colour'd heav'n and ruddy mountain-head.

"Why weep ye, then, for him who, having run
 The bound of man's appointed years, at last,
 God's promises fulfill'd, life's labours done,
 Serenely to his final rest has past;
 While the soft memory of his virtues yet
 Lingers like twilight hues when the bright sun is set?"

—BRYANT.

"And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was SIMEON; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."—LUKE ii. 25-33.

SUNSET ON MOUNT MORIAH.

SIMEON occupies, in sacred story, a place peculiar to himself. He is the Melchizedek of this transition-period—the connecting link between the Mosaic and the Gospel dispensations,—telling by significant word and act, that “all old things” were “passing away” and all things becoming “new!”

We may regard him, moreover, as the “representative man” of the pious remnant of Israel of that age. He had long been sitting, an earnest student, at the feet of the prophets who had testified of Christ; or standing, like the mother of Sisera at the window, with the roll of Micah in his hand, and straining his eyes towards Bethlehem-Ephratah, he had been asking, in prayerful expectation, “*Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?*”

But he can afford, too, to resign himself patiently to the will of God. This he knew, that that great event waited for by all time, must be close at hand; for he had personally received a divine promise, that his eyes should not be sealed in death, until gladdened with the glorious vision which many saints and wise men of old had “desired to see, but were not permitted!” At length are his hopes and prayers gloriously realised. “The Desire of all nations,” according to the latest prophetic intimation, has “come.” “The Lord,” whom the devout Israelite had long sought, “suddenly comes to his temple,” and, in the person of a little child, “fills it with

his glory!"* With the infant Babe in his arms, and the tear of joy and gratitude in his eye, he is permitted to take up the strains which for ages past had hung on the lips, and supported the faith of a waiting church—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, . . . and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace," the glory of his Church, the Consolation of Israel, the Light of the World! And now, the rejoicing patriarch, with the promised Saviour in his arms, and salvation on his tongue, is ready to die.

Let us gaze on this Gospel Sunset with its mellowed glory. Let us gather, in thought, around this hoary-headed sire, and listen to the exulting notes with which he is willing to bid farewell to the world. Well, truly, might he exult. The greatest of the Cæsars was then on the throne. But what was that sceptre—that rod of empire, he wielded—although the badge of the world's sovereignty,—compared to that "rod out of the stem of Jesse," which an old Hebrew clasped in his arms? The throne of Cæsar!—it has long ago crumbled—the sceptre of Cæsar!—it has long ago been broken in pieces by the grasp of contending nations. But Simeon beheld, in these smiles of helpless infancy, the germ of a kingdom that should overthrow all others, and, yet, itself "never be destroyed;" a throne that was to be "established for ever," and of "*the increase of whose government and peace there was to be no end!*" †

It is interesting to mark the occasion of this scene in the temple of Jerusalem, which had brought Mary and the child Jesus from Bethlehem. At the birth of every son, the

* Mal. iii. 1.

† Isa. ix. 7.

mother, by the Jewish law, was regarded as ceremonially unclean, and for forty days (as we read in the 12th chapter of Leviticus,) she was permitted to "*touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary.*" She was enjoined thereafter, to carry a sin-offering and a burnt-offering "unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to the priest," who was to "*offer it before the Lord, and make an atonement for her.*" "*When the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering, or a young pigeon, or a turtle-dove, for a sin-offering.*" And in the case of those whose extreme poverty and lowly condition did *not* permit of this costlier sacrifice, it was sufficient for them to bring a humbler one—"And if she be NOT able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt-offering, and the other for a sin-offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean," (ver. 8.)

What a touching delineation is here given of the Saviour's lowly state and poverty! Mary coming up to the temple to offer the accustomed sacrifices, "according to that which is said in the law of the Lord," "*a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.*" But where is the lamb for the burnt-offering? Has her meek spirit already forgot the thanksgivings of that hour of unexpected joy, when in exulting strains she thus poured out the emotions of an overflowing heart,—"*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. He that is mighty hath done to me great*

things?”* No! Her lowly estate will not admit of “*the lamb for the burnt-offering,*”—and in its stead she must substitute the gracious alternative provided for the poor of the people, “A PAIR OF TURTLE-DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS!”

It is from such incidental circumstances as these,—those minuter incidents which crowd His mysterious pilgrimage of love,—that we obtain the most affecting displays of the Redeemer’s humiliation. At one time, we behold Him a homeless wanderer, who, when “*every man went unto his own house, Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives;*” †—(when there was a home for every one in Jerusalem, there was no home for Him!) Again, as a weary, toil-worn pilgrim, exhausted and fatigued with his journey, He is seated by a well on the way-side, asking a cup of cold water from a poor sinner whom He had redeemed with His blood; ‡ and here, we contemplate a lowly woman, bending before the temple-gate, and telling to all around, by the humble offerings she lays on the altar, that poverty is the birthright of her infant Child!

But we proceed to gather a few beams from this hallowed “*sunset*”—a few thoughts from this closing chapter in Simeon’s life, as delineated in the sacred narrative.

We have there presented, a beautiful epitome of the Christian character. And though *his* spiritual graces were called into lively exercise by what was presented immediately to *sight*, that same glorious reality remains to us still an object of *faith*, which we may appropriate as really and as substantially as Simeon did!

* Luke i. 48-49.

† John vii. 53.

‡ John iv. 6.

Observe, I. The object of all his joy—it was “*seeing Christ the Lord.*”

To see God! what an honour! The highest Archangel in heaven knows no higher! It was the culminating prayer of Moses of old, “*I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.*” The prayer was answered—but how? The honoured servant of God was hid in a rocky cleft; and the hand of God covered his face, as the terribleness of the divine Majesty swept by; for, said He, “*no man can see my face and live.*” But here, a devout Hebrew, who trod in the footsteps of Moses’ faith, is permitted to gaze on the God-man unconsumed. His glory is veiled under a garb of humanity. God is “in very deed dwelling with man on the earth”—“*Great is the mystery of godliness; God manifest in the flesh.*” Yes! Simeon stands in the magnificent shrine of which Haggai and Malachi spake. The glory of Solomon’s house, with all the gold of Ophir, and all the wealth of Lebanon, and the lavish splendour of Tyrian handicraft, fades into nothing by reason of the new consecration it has received from that “*Infant of days.*” “*The glory of this latter house*” is “*greater than the glory of the former.*” Let its veil be rent! let its dim altar-fires be quenched! Let it not bewail its missing Shekinah, or cling to its melting shadows. The types have given place to the great Antitype. The advent-lour is striking:—“*Lift up your heads, O ye gates, that the King of glory may come in,*” chimes from the temple-towers. The Lord truly was in that place, though a scoffing world knew it not—“*it was none other than the House of God, and the gate of heaven.*”

The object of the joy of every genuine believer is the same

as that of Simeon,—“*Christ the Lord.*” True, indeed, that Saviour is changed in His outward state or condition. The infant Babe, whom the aged man folded in his arms, is now seated on a mediatorial throne, wielding the sceptre of universal empire. The earthly Temple in which He stood, is exchanged for the august sanctuary above, where every knee is at this moment bending, and every tongue confessing that He is “Lord to the glory of God the Father.” But though no longer an object of contemplation to the natural eye, His heart changeth never—“*Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing,*” (like Simon) “*we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*” *

And as Jesus, the *Object of faith*, is the same to the believer now, as he was to this Saint of old; so will every soul, which has felt the burden of sin, be equally prepared to hail Him as “*the Consolation of Israel.*” The world had been longing for its Lord; it was growing weary of its sins and sorrows; all the remedies philosophy and civilisation had applied, had failed to erase one furrow from its brow, or bind up one of its bleeding wounds. Woe-worn humanity had been sighing for four thousand years for a Deliverer. The Jewish Church—the godly remnant of God’s covenant people—were also panting for a brighter day. The nation’s altars were blazing with unhallowed fire; a general apostasy prevailed; many a holy saint sat in ashes, amid a sadder spiritual desolation than that of the prophet who uttered the plaintive soliloquy, “*How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!*” †

But the great Consoler has appeared! the footfall of the

* 1 Pet. i. 8.

† Lam. i. 1

great Physician is heard—the Lord has come! “*He shall speak peace to his people and to his saints!*”

What Christ was to the believing Jewish remnant collectively, He still is to His believing people individually. In every possible variety of condition and circumstance; in all their wants and sorrows, their afflictions, their sufferings, their temptations and fears, this is the blessed “name where-with he is called”—“*the Consolation of Israel.*”

Are there any who peruse these pages, overwhelmed under a sense of sin, which they feel too heavy for them to bear, and which is almost leading them to despair of pardon? Christ is “Consolation” for *you*. These are His precious words, “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*”*

Are there any who are struggling with the corruptions of their own evil hearts;—who feel the power of indwelling iniquity dragging them to the dust in spite of all their efforts to soar heavenwards;—temptations so assailing them, as oft-times to extort the cry of agony, “*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?*” Christ is “Consolation” for *you*. Hear His own blessed promise, “*My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*” †

Are there any who are experiencing seasons of darkness and depression, who are sighing in vain over the loss of hours of holy joy and peace, whose memory is now all that remains;—any who are tempted, in the despondency of their hearts, to say with mourning Zion, “*My God hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me?*” Christ is “Consolation” too for *you*. These are His own gracious words, “*Can*

* Matt. xi. 28.

† 2 Cor. xii. 9.

*a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget, yet will I not forget thee.** “*Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding.*” †

Are there any who have been called to pass through the furnace of affliction;—who are mourning over the wreck of some beloved earthly joy—some cup of earthly consolation which has been dashed from their lips, and with it all their hopes of earthly happiness? Oh, Christ is “Consolation” for *you*. These are among the last words which dropped from His lips before He gave the great, the omnipotent pledge of His love,—“*I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you.*” ‡

But why need we swell the catalogue of a Saviour’s consolations? There is not a wounded bosom on earth for which “there is not balm in Gilead, and a Physician there.” Christ is “THE consolation”—“the God of all consolation.” He has a remedy for every evil,—an antidote for every sorrow,—a cordial for every heart,—a hand of love to wipe every weeping eye,—a heart of tenderness to sympathise with every sorrowful bosom,—an arm of power to protect,—a rod of love to chasten,—immutable promises to encourage on earth,—an unfading crown to bestow in heaven;—strength to bestow in the hour of weakness,—courage in the hour of danger,—faith in the hour of darkness,—comfort in the hour of sorrow,—victory in the hour of death!

The world’s consolations! What are they in comparison to *this*? Test them in the time when they are needed most, and they will be found to be the first to give way,—broken

* Isa. xlix. 15.

† Jer. iii. 12.

‡ John xiv. 18

reeds—the sport of every tempest that desolates the heart. But here, O tempest-tossed, here is “*thy Consolation*,” emphatically “*THE consolation*,”—for the consolations of Christ are those alone which are independent of all times and circumstances, all vicissitudes and changes,—which avail alike in prosperity and adversity, in joy and sorrow, in health and sickness, in life and death. Nay, the drearier the desert, the sweeter and more refreshing are the streams of consolation of which *He* calls us to partake. The darker and gloomier the night of earthly woe, the more gladsome is it when this great Day-star of “CONSOLATION” is made to arise!

II. Let us note the *character* given of this aged man.

He was “*just and devout*”—“just” to man, and “devout” to God; implying a scrupulous observance of both tables of the law: a beautiful combination: the result of an active, living, influential faith—“working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world.” Here is the secret of all true morality and holy living. Never let it be said that the tendency of the doctrine of free forgiveness is to turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and give permission to sin with impunity! What does experience testify? Is it not that the holiest and humblest;—those most distinguished by lofty integrity to man, and close and habitual walking with God, are they who are looking most simply and undividedly to Christ as their only ground of hope and assurance,—who, like Simeon, have taken Him in the arms of their faith, and embraced Him as “all their salvation and all their desire?” It was the same mighty, constraining influence, in his case *pro-*

spective, in ours *retrospective*, which leads us thus to 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.*” *

III. Observe the special Christian grace in the character of Simeon called into exercise with reference to the great object of his hopes. He is represented as “*waiting*”—“*waiting for the Consolation of Israel.*”

He had again and again gone, like the lone watcher on the mountain-top, to catch the first glimpse of the rising beam. Often, we may well believe, had he climbed, with pilgrim-staff, the steps of Zion, and planted himself by the temple-gates, to hail the entrance of the promised King, saying, in the words of one of the old songs of Zion,—“*My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.*” Nor would he abandon these holy watchings until he could joyfully exclaim, “*Lo! this is our God; we have waited for him.*” †

“*Waiting.*” This is a compound virtue. It is made up of the two Christian graces, *Faith* and *Patience*. When a man *waits*, it implies, first of all, belief in the reality of the object of his expectation. He believes it to have a real existence, and that eventually it shall be his. But it implies also uncertainty as to the time of the fulfilment of its hopes; the possibility of a period of suspense and anxiety intervening, before the object of his wishes can be attained.

No child of God can be ignorant of this twin Christian

* 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

† Isa. xxv. 9.

grace. Every redeemed soul in yonder heaven knows of it; for it is expressly said, that, from Abel downwards, it is “*through FAITH and PATIENCE they are now inheriting the promises.*” Think how many and how precious are the assurances the Bible gives to *waiting* Christians. “*The Lord is good to them that WAIT for him.*” * “*WAIT on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart.*” † We found in a previous chapter that aged Jacob’s dying words of exultation and joy were these,—“*I have WAITED for thy salvation, O God.*”

It were easy for God to give an immediate answer to the prayers of His people; by snapping all at once every chain of sin or suffering, to usher them into the glorious liberty of His children. But He would have them learn a lesson of dependence on Himself,—of trust and submission,—of resignation and patience. He would have “weeping” and “waiting” to “endure for the night,” that they might value all the more “the joy” which shall assuredly come “in the morning.” Yes, their waiting time here, though often doubtless a trying time, will, in the light of eternity, be seen and confessed to be a *precious* time; a gracious part of the cross, which, in the case of every redeemed child of God, must precede the crown. How will not the blessedness of that world of unbroken rest be enhanced, by the trials and struggles, the tossings and tribulations which went before; when life’s tempestuous sea, wherein faith and patience were oft well-nigh shipwrecked, is exchanged for that haven of peace, where not one wave of trouble is ever after to roll!

* Lam. iii. 25.

† Ps. xxvii. 14.

IV. Let us note how Simeon was brought at this time into the Temple.

He came "*by the Spirit.*" We read, in the previous verse, that "*the Holy Ghost was upon him;*" and without the Spirit's influences, none of these lofty Christian graces could have been his. On entering its courts, what does he find there? A lowly woman with an infant Babe. No mystic star, no angelic host is there, to proclaim His glory. Yet the Holy Spirit opens the aged saint's eyes, and tells him to behold in that helpless Child, the Saviour of mankind.

The ordinances of God are the Temple to which believers are still summoned to behold their Lord. The *House of prayer* is such a Temple. The power and glory of God have, in the experience of His people in all ages, been "seen in the sanctuary." "*The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob;*"* and it is His own gracious declaration, "*I will make them joyful in my house of prayer.*" †

The Bible is such a Temple. Unlike that in which Simeon stood, whose holiest courts were open only to a favoured few, it is patent to every worshipper. Glorious temple it is! God's own words its living stones; His immutable promises its pillars; His oath and covenant its foundations; its walls salvation; its gates praise; Jesus Christ its corner-stone; prophets, and apostles, and saints its high-priests, giving forth the responses of Deity! But what will all the glories of either temple be to us, unless, like Simeon, we be *led there of the Holy Ghost?* Without His influence, we shall find a deserted sanctuary. We may have the name of Jesus on

* Ps. lxxxviii. 2.

† Isa. lvi. 7.

our lips, and His praises on our tongue ; but without the Spirit of God, there will be "*no beauty that we should desire him.*"* Many other worshippers were doubtless in the temple of Jerusalem when Simeon entered, and who gazed with him on the infant Child ; but it was he alone who had come forth from communion with his God, and on whom the Spirit was, who "*beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"†

Let the prayer of Moses ever be ours, before entering the holy ground of ordinances, "*If thy presence,*" O Spirit of God ! "*go not with us, carry us not up hence.*"‡ Remember that "*no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost.*"§

V. Observe next, *the consummation of his faith*,—"Then took he him up in his arms."

What a moment of ecstasy was this. The day on which his hopes, and wishes, and prayers had long been centred, had now at last arrived. He of whom Isaiah had sung as "*the Hope of Israel,*" was now its "*Consolation !*" "*Mine eyes have seen thy salvation !*" The waiting-time of the saint is now at an end ; and, with the promised Child in his embrace, he can look forward to a peaceful departure. What glowing emotions, in this hour of joy, must have been kindled in his heart ! That great "*mystery of godliness,*" of which seers had sung ;—the burden of the types, and prophecies and hopes, and longings of ages ;—"the seed of the woman"—the promised "*Shiloh*"—"the Star of Judah"—"the

* Isa. liii. 2. † John i. 14. ‡ Exod. xxxiii. 15. § 1 Cor. xii. 3.

hiding-place from the storm—"the Branch" whose "*leaves were for the healing of the nations*"—"the fountain to be opened for David's house"—"*the Desire of all nations*"—"the Prince of Peace"—is now folded in his arms.

But the aged Israelite, in these moments of exultation, is carried by inspiration down the vista of coming ages; and fresh visions of glory crowd up from the future. National bigotry can find no place in a heart overflowing like his. He knows no distinction between Jew and Gentile. With the true catholic and expansive spirit of the dawning gospel dispensation, he looks forward to the time when men of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue, shall kiss the sceptre of this anointed Child, and confess him to be "King of kings, and Lord of lords;"—"Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."* It forms a fine picture, to watch the sunset radiance,—the last visions which crowd and linger around the evening of this old man's days. He is standing on the borders of the grave. Earth seems receding, and heaven in view. But where are his thoughts? not on *himself*, but on the illumination of the *world*;—on that day when the Sun of Righteousness was to arise on the nations with "*healing in his beams*," and when "*Gentiles should come to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising*."† It is a *missionary prayer* which forms the last breathings of the departing saint. It reminds us of the concluding strain which rose from the harp of the royal Psalmist of Israel. It was a magnificent anthem over a regenerated world—a

* Luke ii. 30-32.

† Isa. lx. 3.

prayer, not for Israel, but for mankind. "*Let the whole earth be filled with his glory*"—then, then only, could he close the fervent aspirations of his soul;—then, then only, when he had commended the cause of A WORLD to God, could he add,—"*The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.*"*

So it was with Simeon. He holds the Messiah forth, in his withered arms, by a symbolic action, to the whole world. As if he had said, "Take Him, ye nations! Israel's glory is now to wane. The mission of the peculiar people is ended. The gates of the old economy are now to be shut, after being opened for two thousand years. The portico of the wide world is now to be unclosed! Gentiles, meet him with your hosannas! Come, Sheba and Seba, and offer him your gifts! Come, Ethiopia, strike off your iron fetters, and stretch out your hands unto God! Distant isles of the ocean, prepare His diadem;—'crown him Lord of all.' Ships of Tarshish, spread your sails for a costlier freight, and nobler mission,—carrying apostles from shore to shore with 'the unsearchable riches of Christ!' Let the kingdoms of the earth 'sing praises to this King;'—for that holy fane, which is now trodden by my tottering steps, is henceforth by Him to be made '*a house of prayer for ALL nations.*'"

That which formed the consummation of Simeon's faith, is the consummation of ours also,—taking Jesus in our arms! Happier the soul cannot be, than when it is enabled to lay hold on Christ as "*all its salvation.*" Simeon having seen his Lord, his hopes could go no further. Earth could *give* no more, and the aged man *seeks* no more. And so with the believer still. When he gets Christ as his portion, he needs no

* Ps. lxxii. 19, 20.

other,—he seeks no other. His language is, “*Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee ;*” for, in point of fact, in thus by faith appropriating the Saviour, all worth calling a portion becomes his,—“the world,” “life,” “death,” “things present,” “things to come,” the light of God’s countenance, the sweets of His friendship, the smile of His love,—assurances outweighing the wealth of worlds.

Observe, finally, Simeon having seen and embraced Christ, is prepared to die. “*Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.*”

Not that he wearied of life. If God had willed it, he would cheerfully have remained to be a sharer with Christ in His sufferings, before being a partaker of His crown. But the divine promise, that death should not seal his eyes till he had seen the Saviour, was fulfilled. He had now no longer any assurance of continued life, and he could fall asleep whenever his faithful Lord saw meet to take him.

Reader, having embraced your Lord by faith, are you ready to die? With a Saviour in your arms, is the King of Terrors to you vanquished? and are you prepared, when it is the will of God, to depart? But mistake not. There may be some ready and willing to breathe, in one sense, Simeon’s prayer—“*Lord, let me depart in peace.*” If not at this present moment, you may, in times past, have experienced seasons, when, weary of the world, life seemed a burden, and death was coveted and longed for as a welcome relief. In hours of sadness and desolation, when some fond earthly hope has been levelled with the ground,—some cup of earthly

happiness dashed from the lips,—some lacerating disappointment, some instance of deep ingratitude, or faithless friendship occurred ;—in such an hour as this, you may have often felt a longing to be done with the world, and tempted to exclaim with David, “*Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest.*” *

But mark! Simeon’s prayer was a prayer uttered, not in an hour of wretchedness, but in one of holiest and most rapturous joy—the most hallowed hour that had ever dawned on him. †

It was the sight of the promised Redeemer that disarmed death of its terrors, and made him alike content to live or willing to die. With a Saviour-God in his arms, come what might, the aged saint was ready to meet it all.

Learn here, the great secret of calm composure and joy in death ;—*a cleaving closely to Christ.* Simeon was “just and devout ;” and doubtless as he had lived holy, so would he, in very proportion, die happy. But the “justness” and “devoutness” of his character could not, by themselves, have smoothed his death-pillow. Many there are who thus may be said to die in *peace* ;—who can look back on lives of comparative moral purity, unstained, it may be, by any very gross or glaring violation of God’s law ;—just in all their dealings with their fellow-men ;—faithful in the discharge of life’s relative duties ;—amiability and benevolence may have followed their footsteps, and in the world’s estimation and their own, heaven is all secure. And yet they may all the while be whispering to themselves, “*Peace, peace, when there is no peace.*” It may be a delusive dream—a false slumber of

* Ps. lv. 6.

† Bradley’s Sacramental Sermons.

self-security. Amiability of character—lofty moral virtues—will prove, in a dying hour, poor preparatives for a throne of judgment. But, united to Christ by a living faith, we can, with this aged saint, stand on the very borders of eternity, with the declaration on our lips that we are ready, whenever it is the will of God, to depart in peace. “*Jesus! Jesus!*” that is the magic word the dying man loves! *Jesus!*—How sweet that name sounds! what music is there in it!—when the recollection of all other names, (ay, that of wife, children, sister, brother,) has faded away. “*Jesus!*” It is a green spot in the waste of memory! When all other earthly props and fastenings have given way, and the mind is drifting like a vessel broken loose from its moorings—“*Jesus!*” That anchor secures it. The arms that can clasp nothing else, can clasp a living Redeemer, and the lips can exclaim, “*Now Lord, let me depart in peace!*”

We have all heard of “*triumphant death-beds,*” *here* is the secret of them—“*triumphant death-songs,*” *here* is the key-note of them. Let us learn the first notes of that song now, that when we come to a dying hour, we may sing it with unfaltering voice;—having then nothing to do, *but to die*, with Christ in the arms of our faith, and salvation thrilling on our tongues. “*Jesus! Jesus!*” It has been the one passport to white-robed myriads at the gate of heaven! It was the name they last uttered on their dying couches. They were heard singing it through the dark valley;—they have carried it with them before the throne. Let it be our firm resolution, in a strength greater than our own, that that name shall be all our boast; “*that whether we live we will live unto the Lord, or whether we die we will die unto the*

Lord," that thus, whether living or dying, we may be *His*: that, having Simeon's faith, we may at last be sharers in Simeon's crown, and with him look forward from a death full of peace, to an immortality full of glory.*

* The well-known "Sunset" *Sonnet*, of one of Scotland's true poets may here be inserted:—

"A cloud lay cradled near the setting sun,
 A gleam of crimson tinged its braided snow;
 Long had I watch'd the glory moving on
 O'er the still radiance of the lake below.
 Tranquil its spirit seem'd, and floated slow,—
 Even in its very motion there was rest,—
 While every breath of eve that chanced to blow
 Wafted the traveller to the beauteous west;
 Emblem, methought, of the departed soul!
 To whose white robe the gleam of bliss is given,
 And, by the breath of mercy, made to roll
 Right onward to the golden gates of heaven:
 Where, to the eye of faith, it peaceful lies,
And tells to man his glorious destinies."

—WILSON.

Sunset on the Mountains of Abarim.

"Oh, 'tis a placid rest,
 Who should deplore it?
 Trance of the pure and blest,
 Angels watch o'er it!
 Sleep of his mortal night,
 Sorrow can't break it;
 Heaven's own morning light
 Alone shall wake it.

"Nobly thy course is run,
 Splendour is round it;
 Bravely thy fight is won,
 Martyrdom crown'd it.
 In the high warfare
 Of heaven grown hoary,
 Thou'rt gone like the summer sun,
 Shrouded in glory."

"And he sent, and beheaded JOHN in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart."—MAT. xiv. 10-13.

JOHN i. 1-25; LUKE iii. 1-20; MAT. ii. 1-20.

SUNSET ON THE MOUNTAINS OF ABARIM.

WHAT an affecting scene is the burial of JOHN THE BAPTIST, —the first martyr of the gospel age! A handful of attached disciples have taken up the headless body of their Master, and consigned it to its last earthly resting-place. And, most touching of all;—when they had completed these sad offices of affection,—returning the dust to its kindred dust,—they hasted away to unburden their sorrows to One who, they knew, was in all cases, but would be pre-eminently in the present—a “*Brother born for adversity.*” “THEY WENT AND TOLD JESUS!”

With all the deep and intense sympathies of His holy human nature, and in the true spirit of a mourner, that gracious Redeemer seeks, in this hour of bitter sorrow, the sacredness of retirement. “*When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart.*” * The cruel blow seems to have been inflicted in the castle or fort of Macherus, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, where Herod (on his way to settle a feud with King Aretas) was holding a court festival. The faithful reprovcr of his lusts was pining in a dungeon under the banqueting hall; and the rash oath that had escaped the royal lips, enables his paramour to accomplish her deep-laid plot of revenge and blood.

The mourning disciples of the murdered prophet had traversed a long and weary distance, all the way from Judea to Galilee, to pour their sorrows into the ear of the Great

* Matt. xiv. 13.

Sympathiser. After mingling *His* grief with theirs, and imparting, doubtless, some sublime though unrecorded solaces, that Divine Redeemer, leaving the mourners to their tears, crosses the lake of Tiberias to a sequestered spot, where He may muse in silence over the terrible bereavement, and give vent in solitude to His grief at the loss of His earliest human companion and friend.

If we hear of no panegyric pronounced by the Saviour over the Baptist's *tomb*, or in the ears of his disciples after his burial; that verdict and panegyric was anticipated at an earlier period, to which we shall presently advert, when He, who "spake as never man spake," declared that "of men that were born of women" there had arisen "*not a greater than John the Baptist.*"

There is something unique and picturesque about the whole history and character of this singular man. Travelers at this day, in the little-frequented defiles,—the rugged ravines around the Jordan rapids,—describe the remarkable dress and appearance of the Bedouins or Dervishes, with their bronzed skins, and the striped Bedouin cloak or blanket, rudely woven of camel's hair, fastened with a leathern girdle round their naked bodies. Their homes either the caves and grottoes of the wilderness, or a rustic arbour or canopy formed of branches stripped from the abundant trees around. Their food the wild fruits of the mountain, the honey found in the rocks, or the nutritious manna exuding from the tamarisk.*

We cannot wonder that these modern pictures should be suggestive of the olden scene which attracted wondering

* Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," p. 309.

thousands to those inaccessible glens of eastern Palestine, in the dawn of the Christian era.

The voice of prophecy had been silent for four hundred years. God had sealed up the vision since the days of Malachi. With the exception of a few devout souls, who, like Simeon and Anna, "waited for the consolation of Israel," the spiritual life of Judah was well-nigh extinct;—religion had degenerated into a round of empty forms,—worthless routine. Its truthful type and delineation was that of Ezekiel's Valley, filled with bones and skeletons, from which all animation had departed. But the long night of darkness has at last spent itself;—there are indications of coming dawn. Tidings spread that the prophetic spirit has again revived,—that a seer in the spirit of Elijah, if not the great Tishbite himself, had appeared in the remoter wilds of Judea! At all events, *One* had risen, bold enough to make his voice heard, summoning, like the old prophets, the degenerate nation to repentance.

The desert was alive with crowds hurrying to listen to his message. They formed a strange and heterogeneous assemblage. There were rough boors, unlettered peasants, and fishermen from northern Galilee. There were stern Roman soldiers from the barracks of Herod Antipas; others from Damascus, on their way to measure swords with a lawless Arabian chieftain. These stood, with sheathed weapons, to listen to one heroic as their bravest. There were grasping, avaricious publicans and tax-gatherers, from Jericho and Tiberias, who came, either wearied of their nefarious life, or incited by the novelty of the occasion, to listen to the scourger of their vices. And, stranger than all; Jerusalem,

from its Sanhedrim, pours forth its phylacteried representatives;—the Pharisee, (the high churchman of his day,) the stickler for forms and ritual observances, rubric and ceremony, going to hear this unconsecrated man in an unconsecrated place; the Sadducee, the cold, scoffing infidel of the age, who looked on the world to come as a devout imagination;—forth they go, many of them, perhaps, with a sneer on their lips; but others too, impelled by a nobler and truer motive—by the deep-felt wants of their souls. Onward flow these crowds; the diverse streams all meeting and commingling around this strange, eccentric man. Ay, and more than all, and what stamps a surpassing interest on the scene, there is a *Divine Personage*, then unknown and unrecognised,—who has come too, from far north Galilee, to listen to His great forerunner, and, in these rapids of the Jordan, to partake of the mysterious ablu-tion.

There must have been a grand, rough eloquence in the preaching of this child of nature. No laboured sentences, no artificial oratory, no metaphysical distinctions. They were short, abrupt, emphatic, stirring aphorisms;—like the call of the prophet of Nineveh, when he rushed through that heathen capital, with his one solemn announcement of its impending doom. Such were John's exhortations. "*Repent!*"—Soldiers, *Repent!*—Publicans, *Repent!*—Pharisees, and Sadducees, generation of vipers, *Repent!* "*flee from the wrath to come!*" His very similes are borrowed from the scenes among which he stood. The masses of rock that had tumbled from the heights of the gorge were strewed, in wild confusion, on the banks of Jordan;—the river fretting its way between them. The woodman's axe may have been ring-

ing in the boundless forests around! "Men of form and routine!" he says, addressing the Pharisee group, "entrench not yourselves behind these your ancestral and hereditary prerogatives, apart from holiness of character and life. God is able, if He sees meet, from these channel stones, these rugged rocks, to raise up children unto Abraham." "Lose no time, any of you, in listening to my trumpet summons! Let these forest echoes sound a warning, '*Behold, now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*'" * Even the locality which this brave preacher of righteousness selected, had its solemn associations. It could not be very far from the spot—(perhaps a little higher up the stream)—where the thousands of Israel had crossed the Jordan when in full flood. If so, this modern Elias must have been nigh also to the place at which his illustrious predecessor had divided the torrent with his mantle, when on his way to the solitudes beyond, which were to witness his glorious departure.

This hallowed ground—the great Temple of nature—was a meet sanctuary surely, for the thunder-voice of the new prophet; its walls, the precipices of the Jordan;—its canopy, the sky;—the worshippers, a mingled congregation of earnest souls;—*brave* men in tears—*hard* men softened—*careless* men arrested,—men of business—men of learning—men of public life,—all coming forth to hear a preacher of the wilderness, a Bedouin of his day;—a man with no priestly consecration—claiming no prophetic succession—his vestments the surplice of the desert—the rough covering of camel's hair,—and his watchword the rallying-cry that brought these many

* Matt. iii. 10.

sick hearts around him,—“REPENT, *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”

Alas! that so bright a meteor-light should have been so suddenly quenched in the darkness of death!—that at the age of thirty-four, weeping mourners should be gathered round his bloody tomb! But he had accomplished his work. Gloriously and faithfully had he fulfilled his special mission, and doubtless he now rejoices that he was honoured to be the first to inscribe his name in the yet unwritten page of the gospel book of martyrs,—the “noble army” that were in after ages “to praise God.”

Let us gather round the early grave of the Baptist, and seek to analyse, for our profit and imitation, the leading elements in his character.

The first element in John’s character we may notice, is his *boldness* and *fidelity*.

It was indeed a noble thing to see a man come forth, with heroic heart, to unmask hypocrisy in all its forms and phases, and lash unsparingly the conventional follies, and sins, and vices of the times. We require to put ourselves in the place of his contemporaries, rightly to estimate his moral courage and intrepidity. It was no small matter, surely, for a Jew to say boldly to an excited crowd of Hebrews, that descent from Abraham was nothing;—to turn to numbers of grumbling, mutinous soldiers and say, “*Be content with your wages;*” —to turn to the fraudulent publicans and say, “Forsake your impious gains, and be honest men;”—nay, more, giving forth the unmistakeable warning to all, that if the covenant nation were unfaithful, some other would supersede it; for out of

barren Gentile rocks, God could raise up true "*children unto Abraham.*"

Nor was his the mere momentary impulsive boldness that rose suddenly to its climax and then collapsed ;—sustained by the excitement of the thousands gathering around him, but which dwindled and dwarfed into imbecility whenever the tide of popularity and power had turned. He was no Peter, with brave hero-speeches one day, and coward and craven fears the next. He was not even like his great but more impetuous prototype,—the reprover of Ahab one day, and the next plunging into the wilderness—forsaking his post of duty. His intrepidity is noblest in adversity.

He who could best read his character, bears emphatic attestation to his indomitable boldness to the last. When John's disciples,—who still seem to have had access to him in his imprisonment—saw their noble-hearted master apparently thus hopelessly immured, their courage began to droop, their faith to stagger. "Could he not have been mistaken, after all, in the testimony he bore to the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth? If Jesus were indeed the Christ, why did He not come, in the might of His divine omnipotence, to the rescue of His innocent forerunner,—rending these cruel bars asunder, and letting the wilderness' voice, so unjustly stifled, be once more heard?" John saw their incipient misgivings. Strong in faith himself, he desires to have their wavering minds confirmed. For this purpose he selects two of their number, and sends them direct to the Saviour, with the question, "*Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?*" Christ, in reply, points them to His

miracles, enumerating them in detail, and then adding, "*Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*"* And when these messengers have departed, Jesus turns to the multitude that were present, and delivers to them a very noble vindication of his servant's character. In most of the utterances of Christ, there is a grand and severe *simplicity*;—the calm statements of a Being of meek majesty—who had come "to bear witness to the *truth*," and scorned any redundant drapery of language. But this occasion seems an exception. In vindicating His beloved friend from any unworthy aspersions, He rises to fervour;—His words glow with a lofty energy, beauty, and power. Fearful lest the people might have misunderstood and misinterpreted the motive of John in sending these delegates from prison, He impresses upon them that it was from no dubiety that existed in the mind of the sender, who had ever been "*strong in faith, giving glory to God.*" "*What,*" says He, "*went ye out into the wilderness to see? a reed shaken by the wind?*" Was John's a character whose fitting type was one of those trembling, shaking, brittle reeds rustling amid the jungles of the Jordan? Is he likely now to lapse into infidelity,—to droop, a withered flower, in that dungeon,—his sun going down gloomily amid clouds of unbelief? Nay; he is too much the hero, the true, the brave, for *that*. His whole life gives the lie to the insinuation. *He* will prove no renegade, who had the boldness, at the opening of his ministry, to denounce Pharisee and Sadducee;—and at the close of it to rebuke the royal adulterer,—though in so doing, he could

* Luke vii. 19-24.

calculate too well on the penalty he should be called to pay for his outspoken fidelity.

Would that there were among all of us (and especially among God's ministers) more of this bold, uncompromising statement of truth! in rousing from their false dream—like those John addressed—many who are content to rest in mere outward privileges;—as if stated attendance on ordinances were enough—the skeleton form without the living spirit—church going and church worship severed from holiness of heart and life. Evangelical preaching, in these our days, is not only tolerated, but sought, so long as it adheres to doctrinal statement, and keeps clear of the call to special duties, or the rebuke of special sins. But we oftentimes need men in the spirit and power of the Baptist, who have the moral courage to stand up in the pulpit as the reprovers and denouncers of sins which have become fashionable,—glossed over—palliated—excused,—ay, to the reality of which, through the deadening influence of habit, conscience may have become insensible.

The Baptist's was no mere indefinite homily about "the evil of sin" in general. He spoke pointedly and personally, to every class and every individual, of their dominant passion or lust, whatever it was. He spoke to the Pharisee of the day of his resting in forms. He spoke to the soldier of the day of his spirit of insubordination. He spoke to the publican of the day of his dishonesty and grasping avarice; He spoke to the court of the day of their dissoluteness, and to the head of that court of his special sin,—"*It is not lawful for thee to have her.*" Nor was there any ambiguity or in-

definiteness employed regarding a state of coming retribution. The solemn reality was not mystified, and explained away, and blunted by hazy figures of speech—honeyed words. It was no shadowy vision that dark futurity. He gave things their right names—“*Wrath to come.*” “*The chaff shall be burnt with unquenchable fire!*”

Shall we summon in, this great preacher of the olden time, and imagine what *personal* sins he would unmask and condemn among ourselves? Shall we try to imagine how this prophet of the wilderness would speak, were he either to enter the sacred enclosures of social life, or stand in the streets of our cities, and, with scrutinising gaze, mark their eager crowds hurrying along! What would be the special sin or sins his eagle eye would detect, and against which his trumpet tongue would declaim?

Would it not be our varying phases of intense *worldliness*;—at one time manifesting itself in public, in the eager, all-engrossing scramble in the race for riches, as if money were the chief and only good, the old philosopher’s *summum bonum*;—as if gold could dispel care, and solace sorrow, and soothe suffering, and bribe death? Or, this same master sin, manifesting itself in another form, in *private*;—the feverish and absorbing money-chase of the forenoon, only exchanged for an endless, exhausting round of artificial excitements to close the day. Family duties guiltily curtailed, and in many instances sacrificed,—parental responsibilities neglected,—the great “end of being,” in this whirlpool of excitement, often thoroughly ignored;—the foot-road to the family altar, or even to the closet, covered over and hidden with the rank grass of forgetfulness and neglect. What religion remains is shoved into the Sabbath-corner. Mammon, the most exacting of

charioteers, giving his steeds breath once only in seven days, and, ready, as Monday returns, for the fresh run of the week!

But mistake us not. Be assured, if John were thus to speak out his honest convictions, in the midst of us, he would combine *sagacity* with *boldness*. His would be no mystical and unnatural dis severance of man from his work-day world; as if business and religion were antagonistic and incompatible. Do you not observe, in the narrative of St Luke, how he enjoins all the classes that came (just as he would enjoin each class among ourselves) to go back *to their ordinary occupations*, but only imbued with a new heaven-born spirit; seeking that religion should moderate worldly cares, engrossments, employments, and enjoyments, and leave its sanctifying influence upon all?

To the common people he said—"Go back to the world and your work, and manifest a spirit of brotherly kindness—'*He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*'" * To the publicans, he did not say—"Leave your irreligious toll and custom-houses—give up your gains at Tiberias and Jericho." No! but "Return home! Be tax-gatherers still; but hold the balance of truth in your hand. Scorn all that is mean, base, dishonest! '*Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*'" † To the soldiers, he did not say—"Leave that horrid trade of war;—throw down your commissions;—cast sword and scabbard into the depths of Jordan, and live lives of hermit seclusion on its banks." No; but—"Go forward through the Ghor in your present warlike mission against the desert chief of Petra. Be brave, and good, and true. Temper your heroic

* Luke iii. 11.

† Luke iii. 13.

deeds with mercy to the vanquished! Set a noble example of obedience and subordination to your superior officers. ‘*Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.*’” *

Yes, here is the honest, outspoken boldness of a man of God; and yet one who took broad and noble and generous views of existence and its duties. Would that we thus sought more thoroughly to incorporate religion with every-day life, and have all interfused with the fear and love and favour of God. Would that we felt more, that the grand problem which we, as Christians have to solve, is “to be *in* the world, and not *of* it;”—that thousands on thousands in our thoroughfares would listen to his monitory voice, expressed in the words of a kindred spirit—“*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*” †

A second notable element in the character of John is his *self-denial*.

Weary and sick at heart with the corruptions of the times, the Baptist, at or before the age of thirty, just at the period of existence when the world—“the pride of life”—wears most attractions, retired to the solitude of the desert for meditation and prayer, till “the time of his shewing unto Israel.”

We have no reason to suppose that, like his Lord and

* Luke iii. 14.

† 1 John ii. 15, 16, 17.

master, his early home was one of poverty. His father was a priest of the course of Abia; and alike from the social status of his parents, and from the education he would receive as a priest's son, we infer he must have occupied no mean position in Hebron, the probable place of his birth and boyhood. But any thoughts regarding mere earthly well-being and advancement were, in his own mind, superseded and expelled by a higher principle, and the consciousness of a nobler mission. He willingly forfeits the prizes which the mere natural man would have coveted;—the pride of family—the love of the world;—the distinctions of learning. Assuming a poor man's garb, he secludes himself among the Judean mountains and by the shores of the Jordan, that he might attune and tutor his soul for his appointed work. "*What went ye out for to see?*" says Christ, in the same impassioned appeal to which we have already referred. "*A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold! they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.*" He was no candidate for earthly honours. The sackcloth and the leathern girdle excluded him from court life. If he had been the devotee of the world or of fashion, he would have clad himself in different attire. But he was one of these lofty spirits to whom the world and all its tinsel glitter was nothing;—a star dwelling apart,—shining not for itself, but for others,—a grand and rare example of self-sacrifice and self-surrender to God.

Noble pattern, surely, to us in this selfish age and this selfish world, is this self-denying man! Not that the rough garb and rude attire,—the uncostly and undainty fare and lodging of the desert, are in themselves either proof of self-denial, or an example for us to follow. Many a time has a proud, selfish, unloving heart lurked under an affectation,

either in dress, or living, or unworldliness. Christianity is as opposed to all this morbid and vain singularity, as it is to ostentation and pride. Let none, therefore, imagine that, for the exercise of John's spirit, it requires the monkish garb and the hermit's cell—the leathern girdle and the meal of locusts and wild honey. All these are but accidental accompaniments,—no more necessary to self-denial, than standing in the corners of the streets would be necessary to prayer. They were perhaps required in *John's* case, to rouse the slumbering multitudes, and attract attention to his great theme. If this burning and shining light had come with the silence and stillness of the dawning day, the benighted world might have slept on, disregarding his message; and therefore he had to flash upon it with the glare of the meteor. Moreover, we know, that He who must ever hold an infinitely higher place than the Baptist, and yet who honoured him and his pure life,—He, the infinitely pure and holy ONE—lived no such hermit existence, and was sustained on no such ascetic fare;—“*The Son of man came eating and drinking,*” and was on that account falsely stigmatised as “a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber;” and yet, in the case of both,—John, the man of the desert, and Jesus, mingling in social life,—there was the manifestation, though in different phases, of the great principle of self-denial. The saying was appropriate in the case of either—“He pleased not himself.”

How much room is there, in these our times, for the exercise of this noble grace! How many there are, who from year's end to year's end—know not what it is to be swayed by its generous impulse;—whose thoughts, feelings,

deeds, aspirations, are centred all on *self*. If *they* be happy and prosperous;—if their purses be full,—if their business thrive, and their families be well provided for,—what care they for anything else? The poor are (with them) a sort of myth. They can devour books describing fictitious sorrows. They can weep over the hard struggle of penury pictured in sentimental novels; but as for clothing an orphan, or helping a struggling widow, or denying themselves some luxury or comfort, which might easily be spared, that the hungry might be fed or the naked be clothed,—they have never dreamt of *that*. If we be Christians indeed, we *must* manifest more or less of this spirit of self-denial for the good of others;—this abnegation of self. John by his example, and John's Master, alike by His example and His words, have left us the sacred command—the solemn legacy—“*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.*” * “*See that ye abound in THIS grace also. . . For ye know,*”—(oh! matchless example of self-denial!)—“*ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*” †

A third element in John's character was his *earnestness*.

The phrase is familiar to us all;—it has passed into a proverbial saying,—“an *earnest* ministry.” Here was a living exemplification of it; and its earnestness was the secret of its power. John (so far as we know) was neither polished, nor learned, nor eloquent. Judging from the brief recorded specimen of his preaching, he had nothing of the logical acumen and intellectual grasp of the great scholar of

* Matt. xvi. 24.

† 2 Cor. viii. 9.

Gamaliel. His sentences, as we have already said, are strong—pointed—vigorous—epigrammatical;—the arrowy words of a bold, outspoken man,—no more.

But,—mightier than all eloquence, and than all the logic and learning of the schools,—his winged appeals went forth from his inmost heart. The words were those of one who deeply felt all he said,—whose every utterance came welling forth from the depths of an earnest soul.

After all, *this* is what the world, what the Church, wants,—a living *earnestness*. It is the earnest man who alone can stand the test, and shall alone be honoured in his work. Have we not manifold instances in proof of this in our own times? Look at those places where there has been manifested a deep and growing interest in divine things,—and where hundreds, before in a state of utter indifference and death, have been brought to a knowledge of the truth. What is the instrumentality that has been employed? Often the very weakest. Ministers of little intellectual energy,—devoid of all the arts of oratory,—who can clothe their utterance only in the simplest and rudest garb;—but they are men *in earnest*;—men who have their work at heart,—who go to it in the spirit of believing prayer—animated by one predominating motive,—love for souls and the glory of God. And where there is this *earnestness* and heart-work, it is pleasing to see those of cultivated minds, and who may even be called *fastidious* hearers and worshippers,—many among them far superior to their instructors in natural and acquired gifts and knowledge of life,—sitting and listening with docility to the “simplicity of the truth.” It is the old scene witnessed in the Jordan wilderness,—those of strong and

vigorous intellect—hard-headed men of the world—polished Pharisees—subtle Sadducees—soldiers with Roman blood in their veins—officers trained in all court etiquette—wily, far-seeing tax-gatherers ;—in one word, hundreds skilled in the world's logic,—shrewd, knowing men of business,—coming and sitting at the feet of this half-savage-looking hermit—a man all unschooled in worldly art and courtly manners and the business of life—and asking him, “*What shall we do?*”

And the same characteristic which gave him access to the hearts of the people, opened his way to the heart of the Tetrarch. When no other power could have reached the polluted soul of Herod Antipas, the earnest *truth* of the wilderness messenger enabled him to confront, face to face, the royal debauchee. He honoured his earnestness, though he hated his piety. “*Herod heard him gladly.*” Why? “*because he knew that he was a just man and a holy.*”

God grant us ever an *earnest* ministry! It will be the mighty lever for a *revival* in its noblest sense. Here is the grand theme for the prayers of our people, that among ministers and students there may be the infusion of “the *earnest* life.” It is this alone which will confound the reasoning and surmises of a semi-infidel world. The world is keen in scanning motives ;—the world is discerning (severely so sometimes,) in estimating character ; and many draw the conclusion, (alas! too often with good reason !) “These men, preach as they may, are *not* in earnest ;—they are only skilful players on an instrument. These pulpit orations are *shams*, ideal pictures, not countersigned by the life.” Hundreds go away from the house of God with the smile on their face,

and Ezekiel's words on their lips, "*Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables?*" *

One other trait in John's character was his *Humility*.

This outshines all the others, and indeed embraces and implies them all. If ever a man could have risen to power and position by his popularity, it was the Baptist. The great preacher of the day; the idol of the people; the first to resume and renew the long-interrupted voice of the old prophets, "*All men mused in their hearts whether John were the Christ.*" Others took a more modified view of his pretensions, but still abundantly flattering, if he had been susceptible of vain-glory. Yielding to the popular belief current at that time as to the transmigration of souls, some seemed to conjecture (from dim and shadowy intimations in the sacred writings) that the soul of Elijah, or of Jeremiah, may have reappeared in the person of John. "*Art thou Elias? and he said, I am not. Art thou that prophet?*" (*Jeremiah*) "*and he answered, No.*" †

How many would have been unduly elated by this formal mission of delegates sent from the great ecclesiastical council of the nation to interrogate him as to his claims to the Messiahship,—for "*the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?*" What a grand opportunity was here for an ambitious impostor, or an elated fanatic! The throne of David might have been, without difficulty, won for him by these excited crowds; or, at all events, the hermit's brow might have been encircled by the halo of homage with which they invested the name and memory of one

* Ezek. xx. 49.

† Kitto.

of their greatest prophets. But what said this humble man? He repels and rejects the proffered incense. "I am none of these; I am but the feeble echo of a Greater far—the pioneer and herald of a Mightier,—‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness.’ I am not that Light, but am sent to bear witness of that Light. The latchet of His shoes (the work of the humblest menial) I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." And when the brighter Light, the Sun of Righteousness, *had* arisen,—when Jesus began to baptize in the Jordan, the disciples of John, in a spirit of unworthy jealousy, came complaining of the crowds that were deserting his standard, and following that of him they regarded as a rival. "*Rabbi,*" said they, "*he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness,*" is unfairly superseding thee,—"*all men come to HIM.*" John calmly rebukes the unworthy spirit. Under a beautiful figure, he tells them that he is only "the friend of the Bridegroom;"—not the Bridegroom Himself;—that his joy is fulfilled and complete, by "standing and hearing the Bridegroom's voice,"—adding, in a beautiful spirit of self-renouncing humility, the prophetic words, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

Ah, how unwilling men generally are, thus to take the shade and make way for another. How unwilling, especially (as in John's case) when but in the dawn of aspiring manhood,—when their eye is undimmed, and their natural force unabated;—when, with strong arm and vigorous intellect, they have been swaying the minds of a generation—whether it be in the councils of the state, or the councils of the church, or in public citizenship, or even private society,—how unwilling

all at once to be set aside and superseded. But so it was with this great and good man. As spring melts into the tints of full-blown summer ;—as the morning star melts into the sky before the brighter radiance of the sun ;—so this lesser light,—the morning star of the gospel dispensation,—after shedding his mellowed radiance, is content to be “swallowed up in the glory that excelleth.” This is his comfort under the thought of his extinguished lustre,—but he needs no more,—“HE *must increase!*”

Let us close the chapter with one or two practical lessons from this review of the character of the Baptist.

1st, Learn from his example, what is the great theme and object of the ministry. It is *the exaltation of Christ!* When men, like the people in John’s time, are “musing in their hearts,”—when the soul is open to conviction, sighing to have its great unsated longings met,—with what are we to fill that heart, and meet these aspirations? It is not by descants on philosophy,—or by homilies on virtue,—but by telling of ONE mightier, who “*baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*” Let the faithful servants of a Greater than John have one ambition, one cause of joy,—that Christ their Lord be exalted. Let them take as their motto and watchword the ever-memorable words with which the Baptist pointed his disciples to the great Being approaching them—“*Behold the Lamb of God!*”—words probably suggested by the scene and circumstances of the spot,—the sheep and lambs passing by the fords of the Jordan to the impending passover. As such, the reference is interesting and impressive. “Look no longer,” says John, “at these bleating types,—look no longer on *me*. I am myself, like these dumb animals, only

appointed to prepare the world for a grander Advent. That advent so fondly waited for is now accomplished. The types may now vanish away. These flocks need no more be driven to the city of solemnities. See Him to whom they have for four thousand years pointed—“*Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!*”

Learn, 2d, That God’s servants must not always look for their reward in this world. The faith of many would have sunk altogether under the successive reverses experienced by the Baptist;—the decline of his popularity,—his own disciples and followers grieving his spirit by the manifestation of base feelings of envy and jealousy;—and, worse than all, his own brave spirit, burning eager as ever, with desire to glorify his great Lord, chafed and buffeted by the tyrant of Galilee; he himself cast, at the age of thirty-four, into a dungeon, and made the victim of sanguinary revenge;—the morning star not only quenched by the sun and hid from view, but blotted out altogether from the earthly firmament!

Let God’s servants learn from this, not to be dependent either on the praise or censure of man, or to look for earthly recompense. Let them seek to have their record on high;—to have their own motives lofty and pure, so that they may be able to say, in the spirit of the great apostle, “*It is a small thing for me to be judged of you or of man’s judgment.*” When their influence is on the wane, be this their comfort, that “*their decrease is not Christ’s decrease*” *—that His great cause is not perilled on wayward human feeling and caprice. The meteor may flash its little moment and then die; but the bright and morning Star is a fixed orb, shining far above in changeless and undying glory.

* Foote’s Lectures on St Luke.

Let us learn, 3d, That Christ's servants, often unrecompensed by men, are not forgotten by their great Master.

It was when that lonely captive was in his prison among the mountains, nigh the shores of the Dead Sea, that his Lord uttered that beautiful and touching eulogium on his character to which we have more than once adverted. John might have appeared to men, at that time, a brittle, broken reed ; but the lips of infallible truth said of him, "*He is a prophet, yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.*" The humble, lowly-minded man may have thought that not only his work was closed, but his influence gone. But hear, from the lips of his great Lord, how he truly lived. How his saintly life was pointed to, for the example and encouragement of the people of Israel ; ay, and when he *died*, how that heart of more than human love sought "a solitary place," that He might mourn the bright and shining Light which had been so early extinguished ! May we not further add that, on that coming day, when all the inequalities in providence shall be adjusted, and all mysteries explained and vindicated, these same lips of infinite truth and love will be ready with the verdict, "*Well done, good and faithful servant ;*" "*thou hast been faithful unto DEATH, I will give thee a crown of life.*"

From all this, let the lowliest, and humblest, and most despised believer take comfort. Unknown and unacknowledged by men, they are not forgotten by Jesus. A sick-bed, a home of sorrow, a season of bereavement or temporal loss,—any one of these, may be to you like the *Macherus* of John ;—the fort where you are shut up with pining heart,—some sea of death rolling its gloomy waves around you.

Be comforted ; Christ is thinking upon you. Glorify Him by passive *suffering* and endurance, if unable to do it by active labour. “ *God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.*” * He will be with you, as with John, in life,—appointing all its circumstances and “accidents.” He will be with you in your hour of trouble,—His loving eye will never *more* lovingly revert to you, than when your soul is “in prison,” and the chains of adversity are around you. As He spake to the multitude in vindication of His captive servant, though at a distance from his place of imprisonment, so will He speak *for* you, and plead *for* you, now that He is on His distant throne in the skies ! And when you come to die,—though He is no longer visibly present, as He was on earth, to stand by your grave,—yet He marks the going down of every sun, He appoints the hour of its setting, and “*precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*” †

And if we would gather yet one other lesson from the tomb of this great and good prophet, it is by pointing to the example of those who bore him to his last resting-place ; indicating, as it did, the true refuge and solace of every afflicted one in their season of bereavement. The burial scene is over ; the body has been transferred from the bier to its rocky vault ; the tearful lament has died into solemn silence ; the stone is rolled to the mouth of the cave ; and the mourners, with drooping hearts, are wending their way along from the hallowed spot. But whither ? “*The disciples took up the body and buried it ; and THEY WENT AND TOLD JESUS !*”

* Heb. vi. 10.

† Ps. cxvi. 15.

Oh, blessed resort in the hour of deepest affliction! Go, child of sadness and desolation; go, with thy breaking heart, with thy aching life-sorrow, too great for utterance or for tears—"Go and tell Jesus!" Others may give you a false panacea for your grief;—others may counsel you to go and bury your woes in the grave,—to stifle your tears,—to put on counterfeit smiles, to hide the yawning chasm in your heart of hearts;—others may tell you to go and feed your grief;—to sit in your silent chamber, and mope and pine over your blighted happiness in morbid and unavailing sadness. But let these mourners over their "loved and lost," teach you a nobler philosophy, and dictate a surer ground of comfort and solace and strength. Go, and though all others should be cold and un pitying and unsympathising, there is *One* ear, at least, that is lovingly open to the story of your tears;—remembering that Friend in heaven—"GO AND TELL JESUS."

"O Sun, where art thou vanish'd?
The Night thy reign hath banish'd,—
Thy ancient foe, the Night.
Farewell, a brighter glory
My Jesus sheddeth o'er me;
All clear within me shines His light.

"The last faint beam is going,
The golden stars are glowing
In yonder dark-blue deep;
And such the glory given,
When call'd of God to heaven,—
On earth no more we pine and weep.

"Now thought and labour ceases,
For Night the tired releases,
And bids sweet rest begin:
My heart, there comes a morrow
Shall set thee free from sorrow,
And all the dreary toil of sin."

—PAUL GERHARDT, 1653.

XIV.

A Sunset on Zoar.

"Ah! 'tis the world enthral
The heaven-betroth'd breast;
The traitor sense recalls
The soaring soul from rest:
That bitter sigh was all for earth,
For glories gone, and vanish'd mirth."

"See here the fruit of wand'ring eyes,
Of worldly longings to be wise,
Of passion dwelling on forbidden sweets:
Ye lawless glances freely rove;
Ruin below, and wrath above,
Are all that now the wild'ring fancy meets."

— KEBLER

"Remember LOT'S WIFE."—LUKE xvii. 32.

SUNSET ON ZOAR.

HERE is a gloomy SUNSET!—a sun going down, lurid and blood-red, in a darkened, troubled sky;—gilding the mountain-tops, not with vanishing glory, but converting them rather into beacons of portentous warning. Let us obey the injunction of Him who “spake as never man spake,” whilst, with solemn earnestness and attention, we revisit the mouldering ashes of Sodom; and, as we mark the solitary pillar towering on the way to Zoar, let us pause by it, and profit by its impressive lessons.

We need not rehearse the narrative. How God announced His resolution to smite down these haughty capitals, whose iniquity had risen to the clouds;—how He acquainted Abraham with His purpose of vengeance;—how the importunate patriarch wrestled in prayer until *ten* righteous were not found to avert the doom;—how the angels were sent to rescue Lot and his family; and early in the morning, the favoured group were seen wending their way up the adjoining steeps;—how, when the heights were gained, the Lord, true to His promise, showered down the burning torrents, spreading conflagration far and wide over hall and palace!

Privileged family, to escape so tremendous a fate! On the slope of an adjoining mountain a shelter is prepared. One special command alone is addressed to them,—that they were not to look back; but to haste them and flee for their lives to the heights of Zoar. “*Escape for thy life; look not*

*behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”**

In a hapless moment, the wife of the refugee tampers with the mandate. With reverted head, she gazes back on the doomed cities. That moment is her last! She becomes a monument of vengeance; and years afterwards, when the waters of the Dead Sea rohea their sluggish tide over the buried capitals,—and when the eye of the spectator, in these gloomy depths, could catch no relic of perished magnificence;—if he looked to one of the crested heights, he would behold a calcined pillar, which in silent eloquence proclaimed—“*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*” †

Although the wife of Lot lived in an early age,—a stranger to countless blessings *we* enjoy,—yet there were few at that period who enjoyed greater. She had been, in every sense, highly favoured. Though by birth a heathen, she had been affianced to a man of God! She had traversed many a league with the “father of the faithful” himself. She had listened to his breathings of faith and holy converse. She had helped him often to rear the altar side by side with his tent in Canaan, and had bent before it. She had heard him discourse, perhaps, of his mightiest honour, as the ancestor of a coming Saviour, and had her thoughts turned to Him whose day the patriarch “saw afar off, and was glad.” Ever since she left her home in Ur of Mesopotamia, until finally she settled with her husband in the city of the plain, she had been “dwelling in a tabernacle with Abraham,” and was temporally “heir with him of the same promise.” If she had no other privilege, great indeed was this,—to encamp for years under the shadow of this

* Gen. xix. 17.

† Heb. x. 31.

mighty cedar of God! And when the uncle and nephew, owing to the vast increase of their flocks, had to make separate encampments;—though obliged to forfeit the daily society of the pilgrim father, she was not withdrawn from the influences and responsibilities of godly companionship. Lot, though he had imperilled his own spiritual prospects, by a carnal and selfish choice, was yet a child of God. Inspiration depicts him as “a *righteous* man.” She must oft have witnessed his burning tears, and listened to his burning words, as, “vexed with the filthy conversation” of his unrighteous fellow-citizens, from day to day he warned them of the consequences of their “unlawful deeds.” She had surely every reason to give prompt obedience to the will of God, when she recalled His mercies towards her; bringing her in safety through many strange vicissitudes;—from being in a state of obscurity, elevating herself and her husband to opulence;—the wandering stranger and adventurer from Chaldea, now a prince and shepherd-king in the choicest Valley of Canaan! That same God had just given her another and still more remarkable token of His favour, in commissioning His angels to rescue her and her family from impending ruin.

But see, amid so many incentives to faith and obedience, how unbelief and worldliness triumphed. She had started on her flight. The warning angels had resorted to force to pluck the lingerers away; and we see them climbing, amid the gray light of that memorable morning, the footpath to Zoar. We could imagine but one feeling of gratitude dominant in her bosom. Never ought prisoner, immured in some gloomy cell, to have manifested greater thankfulness

when his fetters were unbound, and he felt his brow bathed once more in the light of heaven.

But "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" She had obeyed with reluctance the summons. The "brand plucked from the burning" reclaimed against the gracious intervention. Her heart was in Sodom. She thought of its halls of revelry, its gilded mansions, its rich perfumes, its ungodly feasts, its unholy citizens. The scoffing language of her degraded sons-in-law, had more influence over her than the guiding angel's holy converse and solemn warnings. She must cast a lingering eye back on the scenes of her godless festivities, and though the express command of God to look *not* back, might well have deterred her,—she would doubtless presume, as thousands do still, that He would not be true to His threatenings—that He would not keep to His word,—that, for the trivial offence of looking behind her on the city of her abode, she should not be visited with instant destruction.

The morning sun had risen brightly. No signs of such an awful conflagration were visible. Where, in that golden sky, was the storm-blast that had been threatened? She might indeed have thought far otherwise. The material creation all around might itself have read to her the lesson that "the Lord is not slack" concerning His threatenings. The vestiges and foot-prints of the deluge were still fresh on the outer world. The frowning rocks, which gave such stern grandeur to Sodom's valley, had been cleft and marked with the rush of diluvian waters. It was no very remote tradition that could discourse on the terrors of that scene, when the

Lord arose in the greatness of His majesty to shake terribly the earth; and if Jehovah had been true to His threatened judgments in the one case, might she not have felt that the same arm was as "strong to smite" as ever. But she listened not;—the voice of pious relatives, the entreaties of angels, the visible judgments of God, were all unheard and disregarded. She despised their counsel, and would none of their reproof!

Have none of *us* to answer for abused privileges and rejected warnings? Are there no Abrahams and Lots and angel-messengers of warning and mercy, to witness to our disobedience and rejection and unbelief? Can we think of no holy relatives who have bent with us at the altar and baptized us with their prayers? Is there no father's counsel, no mother's voice, no brother's or sister's tears that come up before us in vivid remembrance? What are God's dispensations, but angels in disguise? coming to us, as to Lot's household,—in the dark night of sorrow thundering at the gates of our souls, and saying, "*Haste thee; flee for thy life!*" Lot, too, (God's minister in Sodom) was not silent on that awful crisis. In the depth of midnight, he was at the doors of his sons-in-law pleading with anxious tears, "*Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city!*" So do God's ministers still sound the trumpet of alarm—telling that the brimstone-cloud is charged, the slumbering volcano ready to break forth, and that "it is high time to awake out of sleep!"

How is their message often received? Men hear it as Lot's sons-in-law listened to his. They thought him an old dotard, and his ravings those of a weak alarmist. They scoffed and jeered and hooted him; "he seemed to them as one that

mocked." The sharp, shrill call, at that midnight hour, rang in their ears, "*Escape! escape!*" But all their rejoinder is, "What does this babbler say? On with the dance! refill these golden cups! eat and drink; 'to-morrow shall be as to-day, and much more abundant.'"

Times are changed with us; there may be no open mockings of God's servants now,—no disrespectful or infidel spurning of their message. There is a hush of decorous silence when, in their Master's name, however feebly, they deliver their urgent appeal. But alas! with many, is there not the same lurking unbelief, the same guilty disobedience, the same lingering love of the world and sin? Do we not appear, in their eyes, as the novel-writer, who describes a fictitious scene, or like the player who acts an unreal tragedy? We seem like "one that mocks." The real comment of hundreds, as they rise from their seats in the house of God, is this, "It is an enthusiast's fiction,—a piece of word-painting and word-acting. It is not a sober reality. We may accord with the custom of the age, and pass a vacant hour listening to what this dreamer saith. We may follow him in thought up this pictured path to Zoar; we may hear all he has to say when he would attempt to overturn the evidence of our senses by telling us that these calm skies are yet to be gloomy with thunders,—these smiling plains sheeted in flames,—these forests charred into blackness. Let the credulous think as they please, he seems to all sober, reflective spirits "as one that mocketh!"

So thought the philosophic infidels in Sodom of old. But *one* "righteous man," (it may be, in comparison, a child in intellect) put the word of his God against all their carnal reasonings and theories; and, like the lonely prophet of a

future age, he rushed through the streets, exclaiming, "Yet a few brief hours, and Sodom shall be destroyed!"

And was God untrue to His threatenings? Was Lot the lying prophet they imagined him to be? Were these angels some ghosts of this visionary's imagination, who had come at dead of night to startle them with terror? Perhaps the wife of the patriarch was inclined to think so. As she began to linger and loiter behind,—and as she saw the sky without a cloud,—the sun "going forth like a bridegroom, and rejoicing as a strong man to run his race;"—the whole vale of Siddim slumbering in quiet loveliness and repose,—as she heard the lowing of the cattle, at that early hour, mingling with the matin song of birds;—as she watched Jordan issuing from his gorges, wending his silvery way to water the fertile meadows around her home,—she may have begun to entertain the thought, that all was a devout delusion, that hers was an unworthy, coward flight. Then her days of gaiety;—her haunts of fashion and pleasure and amusement and sin, came vividly before her. She listened on the slope of the mountain to the hum of the old revelry,—Sodom waking up at the summons of the morning. "There can be no harm, at all events," she thinks, "in taking a glimpse at the loved old halls. Forbidden though it be, it is but a *little* act of disobedience at the best. Moreover, if God had been in right earnest, He would have smitten me down long ere now. He who has suffered me for years to lead a life of gaiety, and sin, and folly, and crime, will surely not visit with sudden judgment so trifling a departure from His express command."

She ventured, and perished! She turned round to indulge

in the guilty, because forbidden, look. The rush of darkness came over her eyes;—her blood congealed in her veins; and that column of petrified flesh stands forth an awful earnest and premonition of the coming vengeance.

What an illustration are the conduct and reasoning of this infidel woman of those of hundreds amongst us still! —“*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*”* But the Lord who has kept silence so long, will not keep it always. He will, sooner or later, be true to His own warning—“*He that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck, shall SUDDENLY be destroyed, and that without remedy.*” †

Beware of this same fatal rock, on which multitudes still make shipwreck;—that fatal trust in God’s mercy—that fatal *dis-trust* of God’s word. The inner thought of that hapless lingerer, doubtless, was—What! God destroy this beautiful Sodom,—the pride of the Canaanites,—the garden of the Land of Promise! What! reduce these proud towers to ashes, and involve all that wealth of flocks and herds in the terrible overthrow!—Impossible! But has God “*said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*” Yes, the Lord is true to His word. If we go at this very day to the banks of the Dead Sea, we find in its sullen, bituminous waters, a memorial, which has existed for a hundred ages, of the Divine hatred of sin. There is no traveller who visits that dreary spot, but is awestruck with the scene. The cheerless lake—the dull, leaden pool, whose unfathomed caverns are the grave of cities, seems to

* Eccles. viii. 11.

† Prov. xxix. 1.

defy vegetation on its banks and life in its waters. No fish is sporting there;—no flower can raise its head on these inhospitable shores. Few, if any, birds are seen to wing their flight over its sulphurous bosom; and when they do, they hush their notes of joy. The awful stillness of the untenanted waste seems ever to be reading the silent but emphatic lesson—“*God is not a man that he should lie.*” *

Let us now proceed to gather one or two of the more prominent practical lessons which this subject suggests.

I. *Beware of questioning God's commands, whatever they may be.*

Sometimes they may be strange and mysterious. He may call us to leave our homes of prosperity, our scenes of joy, and to climb the mount of trial. Let us feel assured, in the apparent blighting of our hopes and prospects, in the destruction of our home-joys, there is the deliverance from evils and sorrows greater still, which we are unable at the time to see or comprehend. “*Taken away from the evil to come,*”—is an assurance which has sent a bright ray of hope and consolation into many a wounded spirit. “*Although thou sayest thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.*” † Be it ours to ask, in simple faith, “*Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?*” and to say—“*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!*” ‡ In our saddest and sorest seasons of calamity, He will send His ministering angels of comfort to solace and support our smitten hearts, and guide us, though by a rugged path, away from the

* Num. xxiii. 19.

† Job xxxv. 14.

‡ Job xiii. 15.

empty frivolities and sins of a poor Sodom-world, to the gates of the true Zoar of peace and joy.

II. *Beware of worldly entanglements.*

How many there are who, like Lot's wife, have apparently set out to the Zoar of safety, yet who linger and perish in the plain! They hear the terrors of the law;—they are roused by the tidings of the coming conflagration. They think of fleeing,—they have actually set out; but the world they have left has too many attractions and fascinations. Demas-like, they give the preference to these,—they look back to Sodom and perish.

Beware of yielding to temptation! See what a *look* may do! “*If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.*” In the Greek Church, at baptism, the finger of the priest is laid on the eye, and the sign of the cross made on that organ to shew that it is to be turned from evil, and so to be “single” and “full of light.” Remember how many bitter tears one sinful look cost David; and how for that look and its consequences, “the sword never departed from his house.”

See how sin always begins by little and little. The wife of Lot began first to doubt; then to fall behind her companions, and lose the benefit of their encouragement and counsel. She was left a prey to her own evil thoughts. Like Peter, the loiterer “followed afar off.” Like Peter, she fell—but, unlike Peter, she had no space to weep.

III. *Beware of the abuse of privilege.*

It was the awful aggravation of the sin of this ill-fated woman, that she transgressed just when God had made bare His arm on her behalf ;—when He had sent His angels to warn her and conduct her to a place of safety ;—ay, when she was actually on her way to Zoar,—when Zoar’s gate of shelter was gleaming in her view. She had been roused at midnight,—she had got out of reach of the importunities and jeers of her evil companions,—she had gained the brow of the hill, and was apparently all safe ;—she had been rescued from the idolatries of Chaldea, the superstitions of Egypt,—she had been plucked from the kindled fires of Sodom, and yet she perished notwithstanding ! Sad it was, in olden time, for the transgressor to be cut down by the sword of the avenger, when on the very threshold of his refuge city. Sad it is to read the narrative of the great African traveller, who, after a thousand hairbreadth escapes in inhospitable deserts, fell a victim to an accident in his English home. Sad it is to hear of the vessel that had braved battle and breeze ;—that had buffeted many angry waves and a thousand leagues of ocean,—wrecked and stranded when the home-harbour is in sight, and friends are standing on the pier giving the wave of welcome !

But sadder than all is it, to see a soul that had set out on a fair way for heaven ; that had cleared the temptations of youth ; got quit of worldly entanglements ; got out of Sodom and on its way to Zoar,—yet perishing with salvation in sight ! “ *Remember Lot’s wife !* ” Oh, “ *take heed lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.* ” *

* 2 Pet. iii. 17.

IV. *Beware of Christian inconsistency.*

There is a lesson to those who are like Lot, as well as those who are like his unhappy partner.

It is said even of *him*, that "*he lingered.*" Child of God as he was, even *he* was wrenched with a reluctant heart from his Sodom home,—even *he* seemed to stagger through unbelief, as the angels importuned him to depart. As he afterwards learned with a bitter heart of that pillar-monument of vengeance, or saw it from his refuge-city, might he not reproach himself with the thought—"Alas! may not *my* lingering have emboldened her in her presumption,—confirmed her in disobedience? May not the responsibility of that doom rest much with *me*? She saw me undecided,—she saw me, with reluctant step and misgiving heart, loitering on my threshold. May I not have furnished an excuse for that bold, presumptuous, fatal look?"

Beware of the power of evil example—Christian inconsistency. Beware, lest by our languid frames, our uneven walk, our guilty misgivings, our worldly conformity, we foster unbelief in the hearts of others. Parents! Masters! Ministers! Christians!—seek a high-toned consistency! For this end be ever watchful. "Look to yourselves!" Lot (the righteous Lot) was "*scarcely* saved." He was saved, "*yet so as by fire.*" But for God's angels, he would have perished like the rest. "Remember Lot's wife," and tremble! Remember Lot, and tremble, too! Read, on the archway leading into Zoar, "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" "*If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*"*

* Heb. x. 38.

V. Once more,—*beware of delay.*

“Haste thee!” every day—every hour is precious;—make the most of the golden moments. If God have now sent His ministering angels to thee, whatever these may be, though they should be the sable messengers of sorrow and bereavement, listen to their call! Up, and prepare for the journey; go with the determination of those who feel that life or death is involved in its issues. “*WORK out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” The salvation is all God’s giving—the Zoar of refuge is God’s providing. But, if you would reach it, you must set out, with staff in hand, like men in earnest, and “stay not in all the plain.” The angels could have wafted Lot and his family on their wings through the air; or they might have reared some fire-proof pavilion in the midst of the city, like another Rahab’s house in Jericho, which would have remained unscathed amid the tremendous conflagration. But the command to Lot, as to us, is, “*Haste thee, FLEE! tarry not, escape!*” The angels brought them outside the gates, and then left them to pursue the appointed path

The gospel is a beautiful combination of simple faith with earnest working;—a simple dependence on Christ, and yet the diligent use of means. Its command is, “*Run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus.*” “*The night is far spent, the day is at hand.*” “*Of the times and of the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh.*” “*SUDDEN!*” yes, “*sudden!*” —“Remember Lot’s wife!” What must have been the

feeling of this woman, as, in the twinkling of an eye, she felt every limb hardening—her body incrustated with the briny shroud, a winding-sheet of salt! No sculptor's chisel ever so depicted the horror of despair, as in the rayless eyes of that cold statue on the heights of Siddim.

And what shall be thy feelings, O careless, negligent procrastinator, despiser of warning, rejecter of grace,—when, all unmeet and unready, the icy hand of death shall fix thee for ever, and the irrevocable sentence go forth, “*Him that is filthy, let him be filthy still!*”

Up then, tarry not! lost or saved,—heaven or hell,—are the awful, the momentous alternatives! “*As thy soul liveth, verily there may be but a step between thee and death.*” With all our abounding privileges, in this age of gospel light and gospel blessing, may we not—remembering how Lot's wife perished despising *angelic* warning—may we not well conclude with the cogent appeal of the great Apostle, “*If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall WE escape, if we NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION?*”

Sunset on Mount Tabor.

“Wake not, O mother, sounds of lamentation !
 Weep not, O widow, weep not hopelessly !
 Strong is His arm, the Bringer of Salvation,
 Strong is the Word of God to succour thee !

“Bear forth the cold corpse, slowly, slowly bear **him**,
 Hide his pale features with the sable pall :
 Chide not the sad one wildly weeping near him ;
 Widow'd and childless, she has lost her all !

* * * *

“O lone one, change thy grief to exultation,
 Worship and fall before Messiah's knee :
 Strong is His arm, the Bringer of Salvation ;
 Strong is the Word of God to succour thee !”

—HEBER.

“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called NAIN ; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now, when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow : and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier : and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all : and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us ; and, That God hath visited his people.”—LUKE vii. 11-16.

SUNSET ON MOUNT TABOR.

ON one of the declivities of Mount Tabor, in the great plain of Esdraelon—the golden granary of Palestine, and the battle-field of the older Hebrew history—the traveller still discovers the ruins of the city of NAIN. It is invested with imperishable interest from the one solitary but touching event with which its name is associated in gospel story.

On the day after the cure had been performed on the centurion's servant, Jesus and His disciples, along with "much people," took this journey of twelve miles from the city of Capernaum; and as the shadows of evening were beginning to fall, they found themselves approaching the village by its one entrance on the slopes of the wooded mountain. Jewish cemeteries were always situated outside the walls of their towns, and the time of burial was at sunset. The bier was carried on the shoulders, with the face exposed, till they came to the place of sepulture. Here the lid was nailed on the coffin, and the obsequies were completed.

Funerals, to the least impressible, are affecting spectacles. None can fail to be solemnised as the mournful procession wends along the highway, or the street of the crowded city. But we often think, how little unconscious wayfarers can gauge the unknown depths of many such sorrows, or measure the yawning chasms in the hearts of those who are thus, in dumb and pensive silence, passing by.

The words of the sacred narrative touchingly describe to

us such a burial scene. A funeral was seen emerging from the gate of Nain as the sun was setting. Bitter sobs and heart-rending weeping from the midst of the crowd, arrest the ear of Him whose mission it was to heal the broken-hearted. There was everything to aggravate the pangs of that lacerated heart, and make it to her the sorest of trials. The whole village had turned out to sympathise with her. "*Much people of the city was with her.*" But, in the deep agony of her grief, she stood alone. These tears of hers were not of yesterday. She could once tell of a happy home! The world to her had once been all sunshine, its future stored with happiness. The richness and exuberance of outer nature in her Hebrew hamlet, its summer fruits and purple clusters, had its reflection and counterpart in her own joyous heart—itself a garner of cherished blessings. But her first, and as she supposed, her most desolating blow came! The smile of joy was all at once exchanged for the tear of bereavement. The desire of her eyes was taken away with a stroke. A thousand fond hopes and cherished schemes vanished in the twinkling of an eye, and were buried in that grave. She was left solitary, to toil on her pilgrimage path—"*she was a widow.*"

But in seasons of saddest trial, God often gives supporting solaces. When His children have to sing of "judgment," they can often sing of "mercy" too.* This poor woman's lot was hard indeed. But amid her fast-flowing tears, there was *one* object still surviving, around whom her heart-strings were fondly entwined. The partner of her joys was gone; but he had left behind him a sacred legacy

* Ps. ci. 1.

of affection! One little child remained, to cheer the lonely hearth of the widowed parent. Often, doubtless, did she clasp the treasured gift to her bosom; and as she dropped the silent tear over his cradle, or watched the innocent glee of childhood, as he played by her side, would she love to trace in his countenance the image of him who was not! If the past was bitter, the future would have been darker, sadder still, but for this precious link that still bound her to life. Oft, in her solitary moments, would she weave visions of happiness around the coming years of her boy, saying, with Lamech, "This same shall comfort us." In him every ulterior plan is wrapped up and concentrated; and the last thought, associated with life's close, is that of his hands closing her eyes, performing to her the final offices of affection, and bearing her to "the house appointed for all living."

Ah! how often are we brought to learn that our chiefest blessings may be taken away just when we most need them! When was Jonah's gourd smitten and withered? not when the evening breeze was fanning his brow, but "*in the morning when the sun rose,*" and the suffocating heat beat on his fevered head! When was Lazarus of Bethany taken away? just when his sisters—when his Lord—when the Church—seemed as if they could least spare him!

One day, a sudden sickness prostrates the widow's son on a couch of languishing. There may have seemed at first no cause for anxiety. It is but a passing cloud;—no gloomy vision of anticipated evil dare cross for a moment that doating heart. Soon the young pulse and buoyant frame will be vigorous as ever.

Alas! the tale is soon told;—that house is darkened with the shadows of death;—the last glimmering light, in that desolate heart and dwelling, is put out. He, who had just risen to the pride of manhood, and who, we may infer from the crowds which followed him to the grave, was all that a fond parent could wish him to be, lies lifeless in his chamber;—his sun has “gone down while it is yet day.”

We can imagine (though we cannot attempt to describe) the succession of bitter hours the bereaved mother must have spent, previous to the time at which the sacred narrative reveals her first to view at the gate of her native town;—the sorrowful night-watchings by the tossed and sleepless couch;—the dread anxieties of suspense vibrating alternately between hope and fear;—the glad symptoms of revival; but these again, only succeeded by the too faithful monitors of approaching dissolution. And then, when all was over;—when left to herself to brood over the dream of bygone bliss, and the wrecks of her happiness scattered around her,—realising the bitterness of that which, in her land, and in all hearts, has passed into a proverb—the loss of “an only son.” Whilst the sympathy of neighbours and friends, each having some kindly word to speak of her boy, unsealed the well-springs of her affection anew, and brought fresh warm tear-drops to her cheek.

And *now*, the tramp of the mournful crowd is heard pacing along the streets! In another brief hour, she will have to retrace her steps to a swept household, leaving the prop of her earthly existence laid low amid the clods of the valley.

They have reached the gate of the city;—they have crossed its threshold. The gloomy walls of the cemetery may be already in view. *But* the Lord of life, and the Abolisher

of death is approaching There was only ONE in the wide world who could dry that widow's tears, and give her back her "loved and lost." That ONE is in sight!

A multitude are seen approaching from the opposite direction. To all appearance, it is but a motley crowd of wayfarers coming along the Capernaum highway, weary and worn and dust-covered, after the heat of a sultry summer's day. But, in the midst of them, there is a voice which can speak in tones of mingled authority and tenderness,—"*Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*"

JESUS approaches! He needed no interpreter of the scene of sorrow—no messenger to carry the tidings of the loss sustained by that mother in Israel. "He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." Ere He left, that morning, the shores of Gennesaret, well He knew, as the omniscient God, all the peculiarities in that case of sore trial. He had marked every throb of that breaking heart. He had predetermined and prearranged the apparently accidental meeting at the village gate. And now, at the appointed moment, the dead man is borne on his bier, as the Lord of the dead and the living draws nigh.

We need not dwell on the sequel. In other cases, the Saviour's intervention and healing power are importunately solicited. There is a singular exception in the present instance. No voice pleads with Him to perform the miracle. The crowd are silent. The mourning widow is too deeply absorbed in her own grief to observe the presence of the Prophet of Nazareth. Besides, notwithstanding His other miraculous deeds, He had never yet raised the dead; so that

even if she had known, or perhaps personally witnessed His ability to heal the sick and cure the diseased, she would never imagine He had power to reverse the irrevocable sentence, and unlock those gates of Hades, which, for nine hundred years (since the time of Elisha) had been closed to all miracle.

Without parade or ostentation, the divine Redeemer enters amid the crowd. But observe, it is to whisper, in the first instance, in the ear which most needed it, the balm-word of comfort, "*Weep not.*" And even when the word of power is about to be uttered (that word which is to summon back a soul from the spirit-land) all is done in unobtrusive *silence*: in *silence* He touches the bier;—in *silence* He beckons to the bearers to stand still; and, as the two meeting crowds have now mingled into one,—amid the same hush of impressive silence, He sounds the omnipotent summons over the sheeted dead,—"**YOUNG MAN, ARISE!**" Life's pulses begin again mysteriously to beat—well-known tones again meet a mother's ears. Oh, who would mar the touching simplicity of the inspired narrative, by endeavouring to depict the burning tears of wonder, and love, and praise, which roll down these wasted, furrowed cheeks, as, in the simple words of the text, "*they delivered him to his mother!*"

We have heard of the joy occasioned by the sudden appearance of the sailor-boy in his native cottage, many a long year after she who had loved him best had thought of nothing but of her child in a watery grave, the wrecks of his vessel tossed on distant shores. We have heard of the soldier returning to his long-lost home, when his children were wont to talk of their father's grave in the far East, with the palm-

trees and rank grass waving above it; and we may imagine the joy when the sad dream of years was reversed, and he stood alive before them, locking them by turns in his embrace. What must have been the joy of this Hebrew mother, when the new lease of a prized existence was granted by a gracious Saviour; and, as she returned, holding that hand she had never thought to clasp again on earth, exclaiming—*“This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!”*

Let us gather a few practical truths and reflections from this suggestive narrative.

I. We have here an attestation to the *Saviour's divinity*.

We have other examples in Scripture of individuals raised from the dead. We have Elijah, at Sarepta, raising another widow's son;—Elisha raising the son of the Shunamite;—Peter raising the young woman, Tabitha. But all these cases were effected permissively, by mere delegated power. These holy men stormed death in his iron stronghold; but it was not with their own weapons. Their language was either *“Thus saith the Lord,”* or else, *“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”** They ever disowned and repudiated the thought of any inherent ability over life,—any usurpation of the Divine prerogative. *They acted only as servants.* But *here,* there is no acknowledgment of derivative power. *“As a son over His own house,”* Christ gives forth the mandate of uncontrolled Omnipotence, *“Young man, I say unto thee.”*

O blessed assurance! that that Being to whom I owe every blessing I enjoy;—every hope for time and for eternity,

* Acts iii. 6.

—who was nailed for me on the bitter cross, and for me, closed His eyes in a sleep of death,—that He had infinite Godhead in mysterious union with suffering, sorrowing, woe-worn, death-stricken humanity; and, now that He is upon the throne, and “all power is committed to Him both in heaven and in earth,” that nothing can resist His commands, nothing baffle His behests and purposes. There is no evil but His power can ward off,—there is no calamity but He can avert, if He pleases. The “I SAY UNTO YOU,” He uttered over the bier at Nain, is His omnific formula FOR all times and AT all times. “He *speaks*, and it is *done!*”

II. Let us learn *the tenderness and compassion of Christ as Man.*

It is striking to observe in the more prominent events of our Lord's public ministry, how the manifestations of His Manhood and Godhead go together. There is generally a joint exhibition of majesty and tenderness; proclaiming that, while He is God, He is yet “a brother”—while a brother, He is yet “God.”

It is the case here. We have just marked the unmistakeable proofs, that He who arrests that weeping crowd is indeed Divine! *Omniscience* brought Him there;—the act of *omnipotence* demonstrates His deity in the eyes of the beholders.

But He is more than this. His look of compassion—His tear of sympathy—proclaim that, in that same bosom where resides the might of Godhead, there beats also all the tenderness of human affection. Observe, it was the sight of *woe* (the contemplation of human misery) which stirred to

its depths that Heart of hearts. It would seem as if He could not look on human grief without that grief becoming His own. In the similar case of Lazarus, it was not the bitter thought of a lost and dead friend, which unsealed the fountain of His own tears. This it could not be; for, four days previously, He had spoken, in calm composure, of that departure; and when He stood in the graveyard, He knew that, in a few moments, the victim of death would have his eyes rekindled with living lustre. At Bethany, (as here at Nain,) it was simply the spectacle of human *suffering* that made its irresistible appeal to His emotional nature. The Rod of human compassion touched the Rock of Ages, and the streams of tenderness gushed forth. “*When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews weeping which came with her, JESUS WEPT.*” * “*When the Lord saw*” this poor widow “*He had compassion on her.*” He hears her bitter, heart-rending weeping in the midst of the mourners; and, as we already noted—for it is worthy of observation—utters the soothing, sympathetic *word*, before He utters the Godlike mandate.

Nor should we overlook the fact, that it was *but a word* He uttered. This reveals an exquisite and touching feature in the Saviour’s humanity. It attests how intensely delicate and sensitive, as well as true, that humanity was. When we meet a mourner, after a severe trial, we shrink from the meeting; glad, perhaps, when the sad and dreaded call of courtesy is over. There is a studied reserve in making a reference to the blank;—or, if that reference is made, it is short—in a passing word. The press of the hand often expresses *what*

* John ii. 33-35.

the lips shrink from uttering. In that touching picture we have of patriarchal grief, Job's friends and mourners sat for seven days at his side, and not a syllable was spoken.* It was so here with Jesus. He (even He) does not intrude with a long utterance of sympathy. There is no lengthened and commonplace condolence. With a tear in His eye, and a suppressed sob, all He says is, "*Weep not.*"

It was the same, afterwards, with Mary at Bethany. There was not even the one *word*;—nothing but the significant TEARS.

Behold, then, the beautiful and touching sympathy of a fellow-mourner—"the Brother born for adversity." "*When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her!*" We have seen that that weeping, forlorn woman, had no lack of other sorrowing friends. Her case seemed to be matter of notoriety. Many went out to mingle their tears with hers. But the sympathy of all these could only go a certain way. They could not be expected to enter into the peculiarities of her woe. Human sympathy is, at best, imperfect; sometimes selfish, always finite and temporary. Not so the sympathy of Him who had just joined the funeral procession. He could say, as none else can, "*I know your sorrows.*" † The sympathy of the kindest friend on earth knows a limit,—Jesus' sympathy knows none. Who knows but, in that gentle utterance of tender feeling, and in the deep compassion which dictated it, the Son of Man, the Virgin-born, may have had in view another "*Mother,*" whose hour of similar bereavement was now at hand; when His own death was to be "the sword" which was to "pierce her soul." ‡ "*Weep*

* Bradley's Sermons.

† Exod. iii. 7.

‡ Luke ii.

not ;”—that is often an unkind arrest put by man on the sacredness of human sorrow, as if it were unworthy to weep tears which Christ wept before us. But He (the Great Saviour) who came to dry more fearful floods of sorrow, could, in His compassionate tenderness, speak His own calming word. That hour was a presage and foreshadow of a happier time, when, in a sorrowless world, “*God shall wipe away all TEARS from off all faces.*”

Oh that in all our seasons of trial, we could appropriate this fellow-feeling of the Prince of Sufferers ;—that divine compassion, in comparison with which, the tenderest and best human sympathy is but as dust in the balance ! Whatever be your present experiences of sorrow,—loss of health,—loss of wealth,—the unkindness or treachery of trusted friends,—remember, the Saviour and sympathiser of Nain, is still the same ! He *had* compassion—He *has* compassion still. He who stopped the bier, on that summer’s night, in the plains of Jezreel, still lives, and loves, and supports, and pities ; and *will* continue to pity, until pity be no longer needed, in a world of light and love,—of purity and peace.

III. Let us, from this, as from other similar narratives, recall SIN *as the cause of death*. It is sin which has caused weeping eyes, funeral processions, widowed and bereft hearts.

There is a sadder death than the death of the body ;—there is a deeper compassion, which this Saviour of love feels over *lost souls*. He is ever stooping over His world, and marking *this* one and *that* one—borne on to their spiritual grave—‘*dead in trespasses and sins.*’ He is standing, even now

at the gate of the heavenly city, as He did of old at the gate of Nain, calling upon such,—“*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life.*” “*I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*” His ministers, His ambassadors, are called to fulfil a mission to the *dead*,—“*He said unto me,*” said Ezekiel, “*Prophecy upon these dry bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!*” Remember, His calling time, and your awaking time, shall soon be past. In the might of the great Restorer, then, rise from your bier of sin, and walk in newness of life;—so that when the hour of resurrection overtakes you, and, with the buried millions of the globe, you shall “hear the voice of the Son of God,” it may be with joy to obey the summons, “*Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust.*”

IV. The narrative before us is full of comfort to the tried and bereaved.

“**WEEP NOT!**” He does not mean, by uttering that word, to put an unkind arrest on tears;—He seems by it rather to say—“Do not shed tears by mistake. If you knew all the design and purpose I have in that bitter sorrow—that aching trial—you would chase these tears away. Give expression to no hasty surmises with regard to my doings.”

Look at the scene here described. We read that those present at the funeral—the attendant crowd of mourners and spectators—“glorified God.” Ay, and could we rend these heavens and ascend up amid the heavenly worshippers,—who knows but perchance we might see *there* two glorified forms bending over the memories of that sunset hour

at Nain ;—the Widow and her Son,—telling, with tearless eyes, that it was that death-scene which had led them to their thrones and crowns !

God is ever saying to us, “ Trust me in the dark ; ”—there shall yet be a revelation of mercy and love in these mysterious trials ! That “ *Weep not* ” of Nain, was intended to carry its message of solace and comfort to the myriad hearts of all time, crushed with their ever-varying sorrows ;—and more especially to those bearing their most cherished treasures to the custody of the tomb. He would proclaim to us, even now, that He has “ power over death ; ”—that the King of terrors must own the sceptre of the King of kings. He prepares His whole Church, in this miracle, for singing the prophetic song—“ *O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?* ” He gives to the world a pledge of the summons which will one day be addressed to its slumbering myriads—“ *Arise !* ” when “ *all that are in their graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth.* ”

Nor, once more, is the simple statement here made with reference to the young man, without its inferential meaning, “ *He delivered him to his mother.* ”

Jesus rested not with the mere summons to life ; nor with beholding the young man raising himself up on his bier, and giving utterance to articulate sounds ; but He takes him by the hand, and places it in that of his rejoicing parent ! His first act, on raising him, is to restore him to the heart that mourned him, and to permit them to resume together their old joyous intercourse.

It is indeed a mere inference, or reflection, suggested by the passage, but borne out by many more decided Scripture

references. May it not, however, lead us to cherish the joyful and delightful prospect, at the resurrection, of a reunion with those we have loved ; that those tender affections, nurtured and hallowed on earth, shall only be for a time interrupted by death, to be resumed in better and brighter worlds,—where the pang of bereavement, and orphanage, and widowhood, shall no longer be either felt or feared ! The great “ARISE !” which shall startle the sleeping dead, (the sleepers in Jesus,) shall be followed by personal recognitions, sacred reunions,—the old smiles of earth lighting up the countenance,—the voice, with its old familiar tones, tuned and prepared for nobler services and loftier songs !

Meanwhile, let the bereaved and sorrowful bow with a calm un murmuring submission to the will of God ;—rejoicing in the present possession of the compassion of Jesus, and looking forward, with triumphant hearts, to that cloudless morning when “*the sun*” of earthly prosperity shall “*no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw itself ;*”—but when (reunited to death-divided friends, and with no tear to dim their eyes) “*the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended.*”

“———Though not yet

The dead sit up and speak,
 Answering its call ; we gladlier rest
 Our darlings on earth’s quiet breast,
 And our hearts feel they must not break.

“Far better they should sleep awhile
 Within the church’s shade ;
 Nor wake until new heaven, new earth,
 Meet for their new immortal birth,
 For their abiding place be made ;

“Than wander back to life, and lean
On our frail love once more.
'Tis sweet, as year by year we lose
Friends out of sight, in faith to muse
How grows in Paradise our store.

“Then pass, ye mourners, cheerly on,
Through prayer unto the tomb;
Still, as ye watch life's falling leaf,
Gathering from every loss and grief
Hope of new spring and endless home.”

XVI.

The Great Sunset.

“ Bound upon the accursed tree,
Faint and bleeding, who is He ?
By the eyes so pale and dim,
Streaming blood and writhing limb,
By the flesh with scourges torn,
By the crown of twisted thorn,
By the side so deeply pierced,
By the baffled burning thirst,
By the drooping death-dew'd brow,
SON OF MAN, 'tis Thou ! 'tis Thou ! ”

—MILMAN.

“ Thou noble countenance !
All earthly suns are pale
Before the brightness of that glance,
At which a world shall quail ;
How is it quench'd and gone !
Those gracious eyes grow dim !
Whence grew that cheek so pale and wan ?
Who dared to scoff at *Him* ?

“ All lovely hues of life,
That glow'd on lip and cheek,
Have vanish'd in that awful strife ;
The Mighty One is weak.
Pale Death has won the day,
He triumphs in this hour,
When strength and beauty fade away,
And yield them to his power.”

—PAUL GERHARDT.

“ When JESUS therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished :
and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”—JOHN xix. 30.

THE GREAT SUNSET.

WE have been contemplating, in the preceding pages, the death-scenes of Scripture worthies, whose names are, in most cases, illustrious in sacred story.

ONE other yet remains.

If we have been watching, with interest, some noble "suns" in the world's old firmament hastening to their setting,—going down in their western horizon amid bars of purple and gold,—what shall we say of THE GREAT SUNSET?—with what feelings shall we surround the awful death-couch, and watch the dying countenance, of the incarnate SON OF GOD?

We have seen, in the case of the others, their influence surviving dissolution,—the rays of these glorious luminaries lingering on the world's mountain-tops,—so that it could be said of this and that one—"*He, being dead, yet speaketh.*" But lo! at the setting of the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, the universe itself seems to catch the glory. Not a few solitary mountain-peaks, but the whole world, is bathed in the light of His dying radiance. It sprinkles the everlasting hills. It gilds and glorifies the very throne of God.

If we have stood, with bated breath, around some of these death-couches of patriarchs, and prophets, and kings, to listen to their *last utterances*,—nay, if we treasure, with unutterable solemnity, the parting words of loved ones of our own family or acquaintance,—with what feelings shall we gather around the *Cross of JESUS*, and hear HIS dying

cry? Every incident in His life of marvel—every utterance of His heart of love—is priceless. But full of peculiar solemnity, surely, must be that last saying which fell from His lips, when His eyes were about to close in their sleep of death. It was the moment of all moments!—the golden link which connected the past and the future,—the bright focus-point to which all history, type, vision, prophecy, converged.

And what *was* that declaration? It consisted of but *one* word, (though rendered by three words in our English version.) That word was the commencement of endless, undying echoes—“*Finished!*” “*He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost!*”

Let us feebly attempt to picture to ourselves the scene when that word was uttered. It had been darkness over all the land till now. But the light again shines;—the pall is removed;—the sackclothed sun disrobes himself of his mourning, and again discloses the spectacle which the supernatural gloom had hidden. What a spectacle was *that!*—the sinless, spotless Jesus, transfixed, in the agonies of a shameful death, to the felon’s tree;—His back bared for the scourge;—his brow lacerated with the crown of thorns;—his cheeks mangled by the cruel hands that had “plucked off the hair.” Faint with loss of blood, exhausted with torture, parched with thirst,—the nerves of the hands and feet (most sensitive of all the body to suffering) bearing the whole weight of the exhausted frame! A surging sea of human beings was beneath. Two ruffian thieves are struggling, in their last agonies, at His side; while in the distance, the Temple is seen gradually emerging, in snowy

whiteness, from its three hours' darkness, and the green slopes of Olivet are lighted by the descending sun. The calm repose of death settles on the countenance of Him, who, two days before, had moistened the turf of that mountain with tears of compassion, and sprinkled its olive-boughs with drops of blood for His crucifiers!

Let us turn aside for a little, and see this great sight. As we take our position with that sorrowful group who "stood by the cross of Jesus: his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene,"—let us take the shoes from off our feet, for the place whereon we are about to stand is holy ground!

We shall examine the import of that dying saying of Jesus, when, on receiving the vinegar, He cried, "It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."

I. When Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" He addressed HIMSELF.

It was a word of triumph—a calm, reposeful utterance;—a dying word,—but the word of a dying conqueror.

His soul-struggle seemed now over. Stretched as He was, a humiliating spectacle, upon that cruel cross, and excruciating as was the bodily anguish,—yet light—the light of heavenly joy—seemed to have streamed in upon Him before He sent His spirit away. As we have often seen the sun in the heavens, after wading for hours amid black and murky clouds,—as we have seen the hidden globe of fire, as it dipped behind the horizon-line, sending a gleam of dazzling brightness athwart the whole landscape—a parting burst of glory before the night-shadows fell,—so it would seem with

the Great Sun of Righteousness. After hours of unutterable darkness, which had their exponent in blood-drops, and in the piercing cry of God-desertion ;—lo ! a gleam of radiance breaks from His eclipsed soul,—suffusing His own dying countenance with triumph, and the world with hope ! The cross is, for the instant, changed into a kingly throne. The thorn-crowned Monarch “sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.” It was the moment when the great programme of His incarnation-work had reached its climax. He had the sublime consciousness that the battle was won, the ramparts were carried, and He, as the moral conqueror, was now planting His banner on their heights.

That is always a solemn crisis, in a man’s history, when he has completed some great undertaking. A great historian* has left a memorable record of the evening when his pen traced the last line of a gigantic work. The architect or builder must feel a proud sensation when the last stone of some mighty edifice is laid ; or, in our dockyards, when the last ring of ten thousand hammers is heard, and some proud naval triumph floats majestically on the waters. The patriot who has worked resolutely and bravely for his country’s weal, must experience an elevating satisfaction when he sees his days of patient toil, and his nights of anxious watching, crowned with success,—despotism dethroned, and liberty triumphant.

And what, if we can use the comparison, must have been the feelings of the adorable Son of God, at that moment, when the burden of His tremendous work was at an end,—redemption completed, the victory won !—the moment arrived, to which He had looked forward from all eternity, and regard-

* Gibbon.

ing which, as cycles narrowed into eras, and eras into centuries, and centuries into years, and years into weeks and days, He had uttered the words with increasing intensity and fervour—“*I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?*” If, even in the anticipation of this moment of victory, “*Wisdom*” had exultingly said, before the foundations of the world,—“*Lo, I come; I delight to do Thy will, O my God;*”—what must have been His delight when He placed the last stone on the consummated Temple, and looking down the vista of a glorious future, beheld “*a multitude which no man can number*” casting their ransomed crowns at His feet! If there be joy among the angels even over “*one sinner that repenteth,*” what must now have been the joy of the *Lord* of angels, when He had in view the millions on millions, who in all coming ages, would exult in that cross as their chiefest glory? It is enough; He need keep the chariots no longer waiting, that are ready to bear His spirit away,—“*His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory.*” The great redemption is achieved. “*Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, cried, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*”

II. When Jesus said, “*It is finished,*” He addressed His *Father*.

The Redeemer stood not alone in that wondrous undertaking. Deeply mysterious are those references in Scripture to the covenantings of Father and Son in a bypast eternity, regarding the work of redemption. There are gleaming passages of light that burst upon us here and there;

revealing the First Person in the adorable Trinity, as entering into covenant-stipulations with Christ, "the Servant" He had "chosen,"—"the Son in whom He delighted,"—for the ransom and recovery of the fallen. Shadowy and undefined as the record of these solemn intercommunings is, we gather from them that *that* theology is false and unsound, which would represent God as an unloving being, armed with vindictive wrath against the sinner, and only calmed and propitiated by the bloodshedding of an innocent surety. "O righteous Father!" truly exclaimed the Saviour, knowing the world's unscriptural dogma,—"*The world hath not known Thee!*" And then He adds, "*but I have known Thee!*" As if He said, "If that misjudging world had been admitted, as *I* have been, into these eternal secrets, it would not have been slow to attest that *God is love!*" *

Yes, the Father was as profoundly interested as the Son, in the completion of that vast undertaking. It was *His* sovereign love which devised it,—"*GOD so loved the world.*" "*I have finished the work,*" says Christ, "*which THOU gavest me to do.*" † The character of God was, in the obedience and death of the Surety, to have a twofold illustration, as *a God of holiness* and *a God of love*. In the cross of His dear Son, He gave the mightiest pledge and exponent of both;—of His *holiness*, that *required* such an expiation; and of His *love*, that would *give* such a ransom price.

God yearned over that prodigal earth; He longed for the times when, rising from its degradation and ruin, the cry should be heard, "*I will arise and go to my Father.*" He longed to clasp it to His embrace,—welcome this truant

* See Dr Harris' Posthumous Works, vol. i., p. 243. † John xvii. 4.

from the brotherhood of worlds, and exclaim, "*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!*" And just as on earth, the consciousness of a son faithfully fulfilling his father's wishes yields the truest comfort and delight, so it would seem to be the noblest and purest source of joy to the Son of God, in *His great work*, that He was doing and implementing His heavenly Father's will.

"O MY FATHER," exclaimed He, in the garden of Gethsemane, "*if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" Or again, when He was in deepest period of His gloom,—when the last ray of joy and support seemed quenched in darkness,—the floodgates of His pent-up anguish burst in that bitter cry—"MY GOD! MY GOD! *why hast THOU forsaken me?*"

If there was a moment, during the most tragical occurrence of old Abraham's history, when the faith of the patriarch could have staggered and faltered, it was that surely when his innocent boy made the touching appeal, "*My Father!*" If there were a moment when the courage and heroism of some aged confessor's heart would be likely to fail him;—when his aged hands would be tempted to unbind the cords which tie his son to the martyr-stake, it would be when the words are wafted to his ear through the flames, "*My Father!*" If there were ever a moment in the history of the incarnation, when God the Father's purpose of love to His world was, in human language, likely to fail, or be shaken;—when He would be moved to untie the cords from the bleeding sacrifice, to let the world perish, that His loved One might go free;—it was surely when these filial appeals

were sent up amid the thick darkness,—“*O my Father!*” “*My God! my God!*” Never since the time when the plighted covenant-vow had been taken and sealed in heaven;—never since the voice of the Eternal had propounded the question, “*Who shall go, and whom shall I send?*” and the everlasting Son had willingly responded, “*Here am I, send me;*”—never had the Father’s love been so tested. Redemption, for the moment, seems to tremble in the balance;—it hangs suspended on the will and purpose of the Father! One volition from that Father’s throne;—one utterance from that Father’s lips;—and the expiring Victim is unbound, and the world, loaded in its own chains, is left to the wail of despair. “*Father,*” He cried, in another similar moment, just when the awful crisis had arrived,—when the dark shadow of the cross was projected on His path,—“*Father, the hour is come.*” “*Father, save me from this hour!*”

But does the Father falter? Do these melting appeals shake the resolve of eternal love and mercy? We can imagine angels gathering around the garden and the cross, and asking, in suppressed emotion, “Will He save Him? shall the piercing appeal of the Innocent Sufferer prevail? or shall the cry of the doomed world enter into the ear of the God of Sabaoth?” “*The Lord hath sworn by an oath, and will not repent.*” Father and Son are mutually pledged to fulfil the terms of the everlasting covenant. “*Father,*” says Christ, “*glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.*” “*Father, glorify thy name! And a voice came from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it yet again.*”

And now, at this final moment, when yet hanging on the cross, "knowing that all things were accomplished;"—that He had fulfilled the requirements of a spotless law, not only by passive suffering but by active obedience;—that its every penalty was paid, its every curse exhausted, and the lustre of a glorious vindication shed around the throne of God;—Jesus proclaims, in the ears of His Father, the completion of His triumphs; He makes the joyful announcement that He had magnified His law and made it honourable,—securing "peace on earth, and glory in the highest!"

When a son on earth has completed some great undertaking, or accomplished some great enterprize which has lain near a parent's heart;—with what bounding joy does he hasten to that father's presence, crying out, "Father! the work is done; your fondest wishes are realised and fulfilled." If it be lawful to compare human feelings with divine,—think of Jesus, the Son of God's love,—at the moment of the completion of that which had occupied the Father's thoughts from all eternity, lifting up His eyes from His pillow of more than mortal pain, and with joyful elation,—the smile of ineffable love on His lips,—saying, "*Father, O my Father! IT IS FINISHED!*"

III. When Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" He proclaimed His triumph in the ears of *Satan and the powers of darkness.*

Whatever mystery there may be with reference to spiritual agency, Scripture leaves us in little doubt, not only that there is a gigantic confederacy of evil spirits, with Satan at their head, in league against the world;—but one great object of the incarnation of Christ,—one part of His mission to our earth,—was to break up and disperse this confederacy;—as the

Prince of Light, to crush and discomfit the Prince of darkness; "*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*" On two occasions especially, in the personal life of the Saviour, does Satan, the arch-enemy, cross the path of the Son of God. First, on the Mount of Temptation he gathered all his accursed wiles. On each successive assault, he was repelled, but not vanquished. When the forty days' temptation was ended, we read, "*the devil departed from him FOR A SEASON.*"* When wave after wave had spent their fury on the Rock of Ages, they receded to gather up fresh strength for another encounter. "*For a season,*" that malignant demon retreated to his halls of darkness, to organise another—a last daring attack, on incarnate Truth and Holiness.

Two years and a half were spent in maturing his plot. The garden of Gethsemane is selected as the field of conflict. There were, doubtless, other and more awful elements in that hour of soul-agony. That mysterious cup, for whose removal He prayed, points to Him as the Surety-substitute, draining the vials of wrath for our sins; and this wrath-cup of imputed transgression was doubtless what He held with most trembling hand. But we cannot read the passage without being forced to the conclusion, that there was also a *personal* foe—*Satan himself*—prowling amid that darkness. The divine Sufferer had the anticipation of his coming. The foul shadow of the tempter's wings seems to be brooding over Him in the hour of His valedictory discourse,—"*The prince of this world cometh,*" says He. Again, "*This is your hour, and the POWER of darkness.*"† And again, "*Now is the*

* Luke iv. 13.

† Luke xxii. 53.

judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out."* And when, in the mysterious recesses of that olive-garden, He was engaged face to face, as we believe, with His gigantic foe;—three times did He rise from his posture of agony, to warn His disciples of the tempter's presence and accursed wiles—" *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*"

That the same Spirit of Evil had followed Him to Calvary, we cannot doubt. In that touching and impressive twenty-second Psalm—the very record of the Saviour's sufferings—the soliloquy which, it is with probability supposed, He uttered to Himself on the cross,† while He says "*Many bulls have compassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round,*" He mentions specially "*one*" roaring lion from "*the mountains of prey,*" mightier and stronger than the rest; and it is remarkable that the last prayer of His lips, during the period of darkness described in that psalm, just immediately before the light breaks upon Him, is a prayer for deliverance from this great personal foe—" *Save me from the lion's mouth.*" ‡

The prayer is heard. What is the next utterance? It is a burst of triumph, which continues to the end of the psalm, till the lips that utter it are sealed in death;—" *Thou HAST heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*" § The battle is over! Satan is defeated, unseptr'd, and uncrowned. The vanquished Spirit, in the poetry of the Psalms, "*is led, with his captive multitudes, captive.*" He and his legion-throng are laden with fetters, and chained to the triumphant wheels

* John xii. 31.

† Psalm xxii. 21.

‡ See Stevenson's "*Christ on the Cross.*"

§ Psalm xxii. 21.

of Messiah's chariot. "*Having,*" says St Paul, speaking of the Saviour on the cross, "*having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in IT.*" It was on the cross, the sceptre of Satan is here represented as broken, and his power crushed and annihilated. There "*he cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon.*"* Oh, when the adorable Redeemer, with His omniscient eye, saw this vast Jericho of Satanic power, which four thousand years had matured and consolidated, falling with a crash to the ground; —the palace of "the strong man armed" now a dismantled fortress, and all its magazines redeemed for His own service; —when He saw the old serpent of Eden writhing in the dust; its head bruised and crushed under His own bleeding feet; He sounds over His prostrate adversary the death-knell of His power! At the sound, the pillars of hell rock and tremble to their foundations. He cried, "IT IS FINISHED; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

IV. When Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" He addressed His ransomed Church and a perishing world.†

(1.) *The Church* of all ages heard in that cry what it had

* Isa. li. 9.

† "To whom finally does He speak this word? The first utterance upon the cross was spoken to God, but for men. The second, to a man to comfort him with the salvation of God. The third, to mortals, who in the love of God and His love are commended to each other. The fourth is the first which He speaks for Himself alone with His God; and yet most impressively for us all. In the fifth, though still almost alone with His own need, He yet indirectly turned to men. And the sixth, "It is finished," it embraces all the references of the others in one; He speaks it for Himself, for the world, and for the Father."—*Stier's Words of the Lord Jesus*, vol. viii., p. 25.

long lived and waited for. All the scattered rays of light in type and prophecy, were here concentrated. Here was the day Abraham saw afar off and was glad.* Here was the true Isaac lying bound upon the altar.† Here was the daysman and the living kinsman of Job.‡ Here was the anti-type of the brazen serpent in the old Sinai desert.§ Here was the wounded and bruised and afflicted Saviour of Isaiah,|| yet His “wonderful Counsellor” and “mighty God;” “Immanuel, God with us.”¶ Here was the “Shepherd and fellow of Jehovah,” against whom Zechariah saw the sword awaking.** Here was Daniel’s Messiah, the Prince “cut off, but not for himself.” †† Here was David’s *Lord* “made a priest for ever,” yet now drinking the bitter “brook by the way.” ‡‡ Here was the interpretation of all that long mysterious ritual of blood and sacrifice in “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” §§

Jesus himself, as He now hung upon the cross, and just before uttering His last saying, saw the completion of all these prophecies—the fulfilment of all these types.

Nay, not all;—there was one prophetic utterance of the Psalmist, apparently trivial and insignificant, that had not yet been accomplished. It occurs in the sixty-ninth Psalm: “*They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*” Till this moment, during all the protracted bodily tortures, He had asked no alleviation. He sought no shelter from the full thunderstorm of

* John viii. 56.

§ Num. xxi. 8, 9.

** Zech. xiii. 7.

§§ Rev. xiii. 8.

† Gen. xxii. 9.

|| Isa. liii. 5.

†† Dan. ix. 26.

‡ Job ix. 33.

¶ Isa. ix. 6.

‡‡ Ps. cx. 7.

wrath that burst on His guilty head. He wished to give His enemies no reason to suppose that He desired to evade the appointed sufferings. He even refused the proffered *anodyne*, "the wine mingled with myrrh," which would have induced a torpor, and made Him so far insensible to suffering. But He who has power over His own life, remembers, that, ere He can close His eyes in death, *one* saying yet must be fulfilled. It is all that is required to complete the proof of His Messiahship. Observe, He makes no specific request,—He merely utters the word, "I *thirst*,"—and leaves it to the unconscious agents, in fulfilling the words of an old prophecy, to hand him "the sponge filled with vinegar." "And now," we read, "*when Jesus had received the vinegar*,"—when prophecy and type, to the last jot and tittle, had been completed,—"*when he had received the vinegar*," He turns to the Church He had ransomed,—His Church on earth, His redeemed Church in glory,—and He cries, "*with a loud voice*,"—as if a signal to take their harps and tune them for song,—He gives them the key-note of the everlasting anthem,—"*It is finished*."

(2.) Christ in these words addresses *all mankind*! There is not a human soul that may not take comfort and hope from the joyous tidings of a *completed* salvation. He spake "*with a loud voice*," as if He wished the whole race to hear it. It was the sound of a great jubilee-trumpet proclaiming that "the year of its release was come!"

The vision till now before His divine mind, had been a world advancing to its doom!—a world in tears, from which rose the wail of never-ebbing anguish!—an *orphan* world!—miserable and naked, that had forfeited home, and father,

and peace!—a diseased and dying world—a mighty hospital, in which nations and their millions were perishing. Now, from that cross of shame, and yet of triumph, He seems as if He exclaimed—“Weeping world! dry your tears; bondaged world! your captivity is at an end; bankrupt world! the debt is all paid; orphaned world! I can now tell you of a home and a Father; diseased world! rise from your prostrate couch of suffering and death—tear off these bandages of sin and corruption—go forth ‘walking and leaping and praising God!’”

Yes! though, in the first instance, He addressed His Church,—the Church which He had redeemed with His blood,—He addressed *the world* also. See that bleeding Saviour, suspended midway between heaven and earth!—hear Him, with His hands outstretched, as if, in the yearnings of compassion, He would embrace mankind, saying, “*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*” *—“*Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!*” In another striking and solemn portion of Scripture, God is represented as addressing the sinner by *a solemn oath*. He swears by His own eternal *existence*, “*As I LIVE, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*” But that incarnate Jehovah,—that suffering Immanuel,—stretched on the shameful tree, seems to change the form of solemn asseveration, and thus to address us—“Not ‘as I *live*,’ but ‘as I *die*,’—I have no pleasure in your death, but rather that ye would turn from your wickedness and live!” “*It is finished!*” as if He said, “What more can I *say*, what more can I *do*, than these words imply?—a full, free, com-

* Isa. xlv. 22.

pleted salvation. ‘*It is finished!*’ Look at the superscription on my cross. It is written ‘in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin,’—*finished* for *all*—*sued* for *all*—*offered* to *all*—Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian, bond and free !”

Sinner, in the depths of thy sin and degradation and misery, behold that suffering Victim, and hear the words uttered for *you*, “*It is finished!*” Self-righteous man, patching together these miserable fragments of your own merits, come to that cross, and hear the utterance of that spotless Surety, who not only has “finished transgression,” and “made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity,” but who has “brought in an everlasting righteousness!”—come, and take that seamless robe of obedience which He offers you, as He cries, “*It is finished!*” Come, *backslider*, with your heartfelt sorrow ; come, *penitent*, in your bitter tears ; come, *ruined* one ; *lost* one,—*helpless*, *hopeless*, *perishing* ;—ay, come, *dying* one ; come, like that repentant felon ;—lift the eye of faith and hope to the bleeding Sacrifice,—and hear those words which formed for him the golden ladder-steps which led him “that day” to be “with Jesus in Paradise,” “IT IS FINISHED !”

XVII.

Sunset on the Mount of Olives.

“ Flung to the heedless winds,
Or on the waters cast,
Their ashes shall be watch'd,
And gather'd at the last.

“ And from that scatter'd dust
Around us and abroad,
Shall spring a plenteous seed
Of witnesses for God.

“ Still, still, though dead, they speak,
And trumpet-tongued proclaim
To many a wak'ning land
The one prevailing Name.”

“ The hours of the day are over and softly the season of light
Goes out in a golden glory, and fades from our ravish'd sight.

“ Eve is the season of rest, the season of thought and repose,
The overwrought toilers hail it—herald of balm for their woes.

“ Beautiful gates of the sunset! ornate with crimson and gold,
Like the tapestried tent of a monarch, their bars of pearl unfold.

“ Far up in heaven they open, bidding earth's light grow dim,
That the children of men may gather, and sing their evening hymn.

“ Homeward, I hear it whisper'd on each dying breath of the breeze;
'Tis the burden of the sunset with its choral symphonies.

“ Every night brings us nearer, nearer, and every departing sun
Bids us take heart and labour, for soon will our work be done.”

“ And devout men carried STEPHEN to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”—ACTS viii. 2.

SUNSET ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

WHERE the funeral lamentations of these devout mourners took place, we cannot tell. There is a story (which, however, rests on doubtful tradition,) that Gamaliel, Paul's instructor, himself in secret a Christian, had the mangled body of STEPHEN conveyed to a private burial-ground in his own villa, twenty miles distant from Jerusalem ;—that, in accordance with oriental wont, he mourned for him seventy days ;—and that, when he himself was approaching death, he gave directions that his own ashes were to mingle with those of the venerated martyr.*

Be this as it may, let us gather, in thought, around the rude death-couch of this spiritual hero, and watch the going down of his earthly sun. It is a "sunset" alike mournful and glorious. The sky itself is stormy and lowering ; but the peaceful orb descends in calm majesty, bathed in the light and glory of a brighter hemisphere.

The death and martyrdom of Stephen has been, to the Church in every age, a hallowed memorial of faith, stern endurance, Christian meekness, and love. It was a testimony specially needed in the apostolic age ; for well has it been observed (though the remark is a sad one) that, "the first apostle who died was a traitor ; the first disciples of the apostles were hypocrites and liars ;—the kingdom of the Son of man was founded in darkness and gloom."† But

* See note in Howson and Conybeare, *St Paul*, *in loco*.

† *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 83.

here, at last, was a true sun, amid these wandering stars, shedding a chastened and mellowed glory in the olden firmament. Doubtless, the simple but sublime narrative of Stephen's dying moments, nerved the arm and braced the faith of many of the noble army of martyrs who immediately followed him, and whose blood became the seed of the Church.

Let us mingle, in thought, among the crowd of "devout men" who are "carrying him to his burial," and gather a few instructive lessons.

Of his earlier history we know little, save that he was a Grecian, or foreign Jew, converted to the faith of Jesus of Nazareth,* and selected by the Church as one of the seven deacons who were to have the administration of the fund for destitute Christian widows. As a Hellenist,† his mind was not warped with the weak prejudices which beset the Jewish converts resident in Palestine. Many of these still fondly clung to the old nationality. They looked with pride on their ritual, their temple, their ancestral privileges. Stephen was, in this respect, a step in advance even of the apostles themselves. He saw a nobler spiritual shrine rising on the ruins of the temple of Jerusalem;—true worshippers from every nation gathering within its sacred courts, and confessing that "*Jesus Christ was Lord.*"

His character is delineated in a single sentence: He was "*a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost*"—"*full of faith and power.*"‡ These are equivalent and convertible

* Some hold that Stephen was one of the seventy disciples selected by our Lord, others that he was converted by Peter's sermon at Pentecost; but both must be matter of conjecture.

† See Neander.

‡ Acts vi. 8.

terms—for the power this man of faith had was God-derived. The faith of his life, and the superhuman heroism of his death, have this as their exponent—“*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith THE LORD OF HOSTS.*” * That Holy Spirit seemed mightily to strengthen him, as he stood alone, confronting the learning, and, worse than all, the furious bigotry, of the supreme ecclesiastical court of the nation. His Lord appeared, in his case, to afford the first fulfilment of a promise given, in the course of His personal ministry, to all His true disciples,—“*But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*” Even to the very last, he was upborne by the same “Spirit of power.” It was this same omnipotent Agent who smoothed his martyr-pillow; for we read, “*And he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly to heaven.*” † Moreover, if, as we shall immediately see, it was *Jesus*, and a vision of *Jesus*, which formed the secret of support and holy transport in his *dying* hour,—have we not, in the two statements combined, a beautiful illustration of the words of the apostle,—“*No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost?*” ‡ As it was the *Holy Spirit* who revealed the *infant* Saviour to aged *Simeon*, so it was the *Holy Spirit* who revealed the vision of the *exalted* Saviour to the dying martyr.

Let us seek to glorify this blessed Agent, more than we do, as “the revealer of Jesus.” “*He shall glorify me,*” says Christ; “*for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*”

* Zech. iv. 6.

† Acts vii. 55.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

Why is it that we see the words of feeble, stammering tongues, often owned and acknowledged, while human learning and eloquence are powerless and unblessed ;—the golden arrows from the best *human* quivers falling short of their mark, while “the smooth pebbles of the brook” from the lowly sling, and that, too, in untutored hands, are “making the people fall under them?” Paul tells us why,—“*My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but IN DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND OF POWER ; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the POWER OF GOD.*” *

Let us pass to Stephen’s *accusation and trial*.

Though introduced to our notice in the sacred page, only as a deacon, (an almoner of temporal bounty,) yet, being “*a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,*” he could not be silent in proclaiming the name of his great Master. We read that “*he did great wonders and miracles among the people.*” †

There were in Jerusalem a number of synagogues, belonging to the Jews of various countries. In these, Stephen took the opportunity of vindicating the cause of his Lord, and more especially in that of the *Libertines*,—a word which seems to refer to those Hebrews who had at one time been Roman slaves, but who had obtained or purchased their freedom. Finding his wisdom and arguments irresistible, his hearers betook themselves to the last base expedient for silencing truth. They resolve to get a conviction against him for blasphemy ;—they forget for the time their mutual

* 1 Cor. ii. 4.

† Acts vi. 8.

jealousies and hostilities, and combine for the overthrow of a common enemy. The Sadducees—the infidel party—hated and denounced, with the utmost vehemence, the new Christian tenet of the resurrection. The Pharisees, with a still more bitter animosity, repudiated a sect who were bold in advocating the death-blow to their national and ancestral pride—the superseding of the Mosaic ritual by a system which was to know neither Jew nor Greek, and by which God's house was to be made "*a house of prayer for all NATIONS.*"

What is their unworthy policy? They suborned witnesses to exaggerate these dogmas, and put them in the most distasteful and exasperating light—"We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." What! "the holy and beautiful house where our fathers worshipped to be destroyed, and all our pleasant things to be laid waste!" What blasphemous words against the Temple and the Law! The most honoured name and most honoured locality defamed and dishonoured, and that too by a reputed "son of Abraham!" Their blood was stirred;—a popular tumult was easily fermented;—the Sanhedrim are convened in their ancient hall or stone chamber, on Mount Moriah, and Stephen stands confronting the seventy-two judges.

In calm majesty, he begins his defence. He arrests the attention of his auditors by commencing with a recapitulation of their national annals. Beginning with the call of Abraham, he descends from age to age, till he reaches the era of Solomon, and the building of the temple under whose august shadow he then stood. But he couples his reference to the sacred shrine, with the scope and spirit at least of Isaiah's

gospel words—“*Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool : what house will ye build me ? saith the Lord : or what is the place of my rest ?*”

This startling assertion creates a stir in his hitherto silent audience. A scene of noise and confusion takes place. Stung to the quick by the anticipated inference from the quotation of one of their own seers, they refuse any longer to listen to his defence. He himself watches the tempest gathering round his head ; and seeing how hopeless it is to combat malicious rage by calm argument, he abruptly breaks off his historical exordium, and, in an outburst of righteous vehemence and indignation, he denounces them as the slayers of the prophets, and the betrayers and murderers of Christ.

The commotion in the Sanhedrim now culminates in ungovernable rage. The gray-headed elders of the nation,—the scribes, the expounders of the law, the phylacteried Pharisees, the infidel Sadducees, the high priest or president of the assembly,—all with one accord rise from their stone seats, their eyes flashing with fire, “*and gnashed upon him with their teeth.*”

How true is it, that the word of God is either the savour of life unto life or of death unto death ! There is, in many respects, a striking similarity between Peter's recent sermon on the day of Pentecost, and Stephen's present address to the Sanhedrim ; but how different the results ! In the one case, thousands were pricked to the heart—the tear of genuine penitence rolling down their cheeks, and the cry rising from the depths of their stricken spirits, “*Men and*

brethren, what shall we do?" In the other, unbelief only settled down into deeper and more confirmed obduracy. Those with the prestige of authority and sanctity became the abettors of one of the foulest crimes that stained the annals of waning Judaism. It loaded the cloud of judgment, long brooding over the nation, and which was ere long to burst in awful vengeance.

That same sword of the Spirit is still a two-edged sword,—mighty to save, or mighty to destroy. Grace received, has more grace given,—“*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.*” * Grace resisted, makes “the hard and impenitent heart” harder still,—“treasuring up for itself wrath against the day of wrath.”

Let us attend now to Stephen’s *vision*.

There is something very sublime in this apocalypse of glory! He stands confronting his infuriated judges in their temple hall. But in the midst of that scene of unholy vehemence and rage, as he looks up, perhaps while engaged in silent ejaculatory prayer, the walls and pillars of the earthly court of justice seem to dissolve; and, to his enraptured vision, a house, not made by mortal hands, discloses itself! He beholds the heaven of heavens! The victim of earth’s unhallowed malice is transported all at once into “*the general assembly and church of the first-born.*” Turning from the dishonoured throne of an earthly tribunal, he gazes on the throne of One who “judges righteous judgment.”

What “the glory of God” was, which he saw, we cannot pretend to conjecture. Like Paul’s subsequent heavenly

* Hos. vi. 3.

vision, it must have been something beyond the power of human language to describe,—not “possible for man to utter.” But there was one part of the vision clearly defined,—one Object which stood forth in bold relief, in this celestial picture. That adorable Saviour who, but a few weeks before, he had himself possibly seen hanging as a criminal on the cross, was now beheld “standing at the right hand of the throne!”

There are two things specially noticeable in the vision : —

First, The designation given to Christ by the martyr. While the evangelist in his description says, “He saw *Jesus* standing on the right hand of God,” Stephen himself, in relating the vision, uses another, and, in the circumstances, a more touching and expressive title—“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the SON OF MAN standing on the right hand of God.” At that entrancing moment,—as the celestial portals flew open, and his eye wandered through the burning ranks which surrounded the central throne,—he may have expected to behold the Lord he loved, seated in dazzling glory, surrounded with some awful symbols of deity. But lo! it is the *Son of MAN*! It is the same *Brother* of human kind he had so recently seen on earth;—He who, as *man*, and as “the Son of man,” had undergone, near where he now stood, sufferings and tortures, in comparison with which, all that awaited *him* were but as dust in the balance!

And, secondly, more than this, he sees Jesus “STANDING.” There is a volume of tender meaning here. Thirteen times is Christ spoken of in Scripture as “*seated* at the right hand of God;” only *once* is He spoken of as “*standing*,” and that once is here. He is “*seated*;”—there is comfort indeed in *that* truth also; that, on the close of His earthly

work and warfare, He was enthroned in Heaven as "Lord of all." On that royal *seat*, "set as king in his holy hill of Zion,"—He is quietly "waiting" till all His enemies be put under His feet; and then, once more will He "*rise*," that He may "come and receive them to Himself." Indeed, Paul's words are remarkable as viewed side by side with those of Stephen's vision :—"He hath FOR EVER *sat* down at the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting (waiting) till his enemies be made his footstool."

Why, then, this strange exception in the text? Why has the seated Saviour changed His posture so that He is seen "*standing*" by His dying saint? Oh, blessed testimony to the deathless sympathy and tenderness of that loving Saviour's heart!—*Seated* though He be—it is as if He had heard the stir in that court on earth;—as if He had heard (as indeed He did) every malicious taunt that was hurled at His holy servant. He cannot remain still. He rises;—(or, if we dare use a human expression to give force to the heavenly vision)—He *starts* from His seat at the "call" of His injured disciple—He feels the cruelties inflicted on *him* as if they were inflicted on Himself.* He, the same gentle, tender, Shepherd that He ever was, sees one of the choicest sheep of the fold in the fangs of ravening wolves! Roused by these wild beasts who were scattering His flock;—touched with the tender bleat of that holy and innocent victim of their rage,—the good Shepherd stoops down from the hills of glory; and, as Stephen enters the valley of the shadow of death, He comforts and supports him with His rod and staff!

* See both these points ably illustrated in a sermon by the Rev. Henry Melvill, B.D.

Who knows, when the martyr was thus surrounded by that infuriate rabble, but some such thought as this may have crossed his mind?—"Would that it were with me as in months past—when that Saviour-God was personally present with His Church on earth,—when He cheered them on the lake-shore, or comforted them in the midnight sea, or wept with them in Bethany's graveyard!—would that He were here, to cast upon me His loving eye of sympathy, or cheer me with His tender words, or with His strong arm to pluck me from the fangs of these merciless destroyers. But, alas! I am alone;—the gates of heaven have closed on my ascended Lord. I cannot tell whether, now that He is seated amid the hosannas of eternity, He can bend a look of pity upon me. I may be left unthought of and unsuccoured in this pitiless storm."

Nay, nay. Behold! not only "heaven opened," and the "Son of man"—(Jesus unchanged in human form)—seated there; but, (more amazing than all,) behold Him, roused from His posture of repose, bending down from the skies,—the songs of heaven for the moment hushed, that He may cast a look of loving sympathy on a saint struggling in the earthly billows. That great Shepherd who "calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out," will not listen unmoved to that dying cry. The disciple has made a good confession before many witnesses, and his Lord (holding the portal of heaven open with one hand, and the martyr-crown with the other) seems to say—"*Well done, good and faithful servant:*" "*thou hast been faithful unto death; I will give thee a crown of life!*"

And what Christ was to Stephen of old, He is to His

people still. In every season of sore calamity,—whether to His Church collectively, or to its members individually,—He is ready to rise from His throne and bend over them in tender love!

What a source of comfort this Vision of Jesus must have been to the suffering Christians of a future age. How they would revert to it, as the axe of the executioner gleamed before them, or the faggots were piled around them! How they would rejoice in the thought that, far above the unsympathising crowd of human tormentors, there was ONE in heaven who was Himself the “faithful and true *Martyr*,”* bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; and who could say, with all the intensity of dearly-bought experience,—“*I know your sorrows.*”

Observe, next, Stephen’s twofold *prayer*.

He is dragged by a ruffian crew outside the city gates;—and somewhere nigh (probably within sight of) that *Gethsemane* where his great Lord had suffered, Stephen is to seal his testimony with his blood. As the showers of stones are hurled upon his guiltless head, the meek sufferer utters a twofold supplication.

1st, For *himself*. He looks upward to that same all-glorious *Son of man*; but, knowing that infinite Deity is in union with humanity, he invokes His succour, not as man, but as *God*. “Calling upon and saying”—(not “calling upon *God*,” as it is rendered in our authorised version;—that word is in italics, and is not in the original), but invoking *Jesus*, and saying, “*LORD JESUS, receive my spirit!*” *Like*

* Rev. iii. 14.

Christ in His calmness and meekness, he resembles Him in this final prayer. It was almost a repetition of the closing utterance of the Saviour Himself—“*Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.*” As we have already remarked, possibly Stephen had himself been a spectator of that awful scene on Calvary. He may have been among the group we read of, as having been “near the cross of Jesus;” and the prayer of his beloved Lord may have moulded his own in a similar hour.

2d, His other prayer was Christ-like too;—more remarkable even than the former.

Having besought the Saviour’s mercy for himself, he proceeds to implore the same for his *murderers*;—and again, (as if he drank in his inspiration from recollections of *Calvary*,) “he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice”—and in the spirit at least of his Lord’s words for His crucifiers—“*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*”

Oh, there is more than nature here! Let those who scorn the word GRACE;—who treat it as a figment and illusion,—let them come to this awful death-bed and say, Is there not something more than human, in the divine, forgiving charity of this tortured hero of truth? We know what *nature* would have done in the circumstances. We know its look of mad defiance,—the frown of malicious revenge. We know what its malison would be on that miscreant throng. How its last shout would be—“Let not my mangled body be cast unavenged in its tomb;—let no murderer here go to his grave in peace!”

How different! His last moments of consciousness are spent in prayer for these guilty assassins. No wonder it is

said, "*He being full of the Holy Ghost.*" It was the Spirit of God, the blessed Spirit of *peace*, that, dovelike, hovered around him, in these dying moments! A few years later, the Roman legions, under the victorious Titus, were to be ranged in that very spot where Stephen now lay; and these gates and walls,—temple and tower,—were to fall under the terrific assault. The conquest of Jerusalem was, even to a Roman, a proud achievement. But a nobler victory, though of a different kind, was being achieved by that one Christian hero, when, bleeding and mangled, he rises to his knees and prays for his murderers;—for "*he that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city.*"* And observe, in Stephen's character, a noble combination of qualities. Indeed, as has been well remarked, there is nothing more striking than the manly, uncompromising way in which he denounces the *sin* of his persecutors, and the loving, tender way he prays for *themselves*. Let us never forget this refined and beautiful distinction. Be as bold as you please in the denunciation of all iniquity;—withstand to the face, whenever there is conduct to be blamed; but deal tenderly and forgivingly with the persons and character of offenders. No heathen philosophy ever inculcated such a maxim as this,—"Love your enemies." There is no more brilliant testimony to the reality of religion than when that maxim is exemplified. We may feel certain, that in the case of Stephen, that strange, godlike demeanour would not be lost upon the bystanders, or even upon his murderers. We know, at all events, that *one* was there—a passive, but not uninterested spectator of the scene,—of whom Augustine perhaps says

* Prov. xvi. 32.

truly, "The Church owes *Paul* to the prayer of Stephen." That wondrous dying prayer for forgiveness could not have entered the ear of the young Tarsian in vain; that angel-like countenance he saw in the hall of Gazith, conjoined with these last faint utterances of Christian forgiveness, may have hovered before him, when the voice of "that same Jesus" reached his own soul, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" They may have done much in instigating the reply—"Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?"

Once more, let us notice Stephen's *calm departure*. "*He fell asleep.*"

Sleep is a beautiful image and type of death; but does it not seem strange to use the figure with reference to *such* a death as this? We can understand its beauty, when the death-bed is surrounded by hearts beating with tender affection,—kind eyes looking down on the struggling soul,—kind hands smoothing the pillow; but it is hard to think or speak of *death* as "*a sleep*," amid a horde of murderers. Yet the sacred historian, simply and touchingly, thus describes Stephen's closing scene!

What was the secret of that quiet repose,—so gentle a breathing away of his spirit, in circumstances so dreadful?

It was the sight of Christ. This had enabled him to triumph over all that was outwardly repulsive;—that vision in the Sanhedrim-hall soothed and smoothed that awful death-pillow. Just as we have seen a glorious Alp, with its diadem of virgin snow bathed in the hues of purple sunset, while its base was wreathed with stormy clouds and scarred with the path of the recent avalanche;—so, the tempests are

raging around his perishing body, but the great Sun of Righteousness is shining upon the departing soul, and gilding it with undying splendour. "BEHOLD!" he exclaims, (as if the vision was something so overpowering that, though he stood alone—no one to share in his emotions of transport—yet he could not resist proclaiming it even to the unsympathising crowd of persecutors,) "*Behold! I see the Son of man STANDING;*"—He is waiting, with outstretched arms, to receive and welcome me, His poor servant. Can I be afraid of death under any form, if it be the portal to unite me to this ever-living, ever-loving Lord?"

And is not this the secret of support in ten thousand death-beds still? It is, indeed, delightful to think, as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, of troops of angels hovering around the saint's death-pillow, and waiting to bear his spirit into Abraham's bosom. But more comforting still, to think of Him who has at His girdle "the keys of the grave and of death,"—the *Son of man* on the throne;—to think of Him stooping from the heights of heaven and uttering the prayer—"*Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.*"

Let any who may be mourning the loss of departed Christian friends, *rejoice*; they are "*with Christ,*" which is "far better." Their absence may be a sad deprivation to the Church on earth; they may leave a sorrowful gap in the home-circle; the devout (as in the case of Stephen) may be making a great and sore lamentation over them; but they have "fallen asleep in Jesus;" nay, at the hour of death, Christ stooped from His throne to receive their spirits.

Theirs was an immediate entrance. The gate of death and the gate of Heaven was one!

They only are to be pitied and mourned who, while *living*, are living a life of *death*; and who, when they come to die, (oh! sad contrast with the departure of the first martyr!) can have no heavenly vision; no "Son of man" standing to receive them; no angels waiting to conduct them to glory, and to chant the requiem—"So giveth He His beloved SLEEP!"

Reader, whosoever thou art, if still without these hopes "full of immortality," Christ is now stooping from His throne to *thee*! He is standing, with His outstretched arms of reconciliation and love, calling upon thee to be "reconciled unto God." Oh! postpone not, till a dying hour, responding to His overtures of mercy. Be assured, all death-beds are the same in this, whether they be beds of down or pallets of straw;—whether under the thatched roof or under gilded ceilings;—they can afford no ease to the aching head that has postponed till then, the great question of salvation! Be it yours to live the life of the righteous, if you would die their death. Let existence be one sacred mission to "please God;"—and then, yours shall be a peaceful "SUNSET." The last enemy cannot appear too suddenly or unexpectedly. Whether a season of lingering, wasting sickness be appointed you;—or "in a moment"—with the speed of the lightning-flash—the summons may come;—in either case, you can, in humble faith and confidence, appropriate that beatitude, traced by the finger of God the Spirit,—a benediction better than all sculptured epitaphs of man's device—"BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD!"

“ Behold the western evening-light !
It melts in deep’ning gloom ;
So calmly Christians sink away,
Descending to the tomb.

“ The winds breathe low, the with’ring leaf
Scarce whispers from the tree ;
So gently flows the parting breath
When good men cease to be.

“ How beautiful on all the hills
The crimson light is shed !.
’Tis like the holy peace diffused
Around their dying bed.

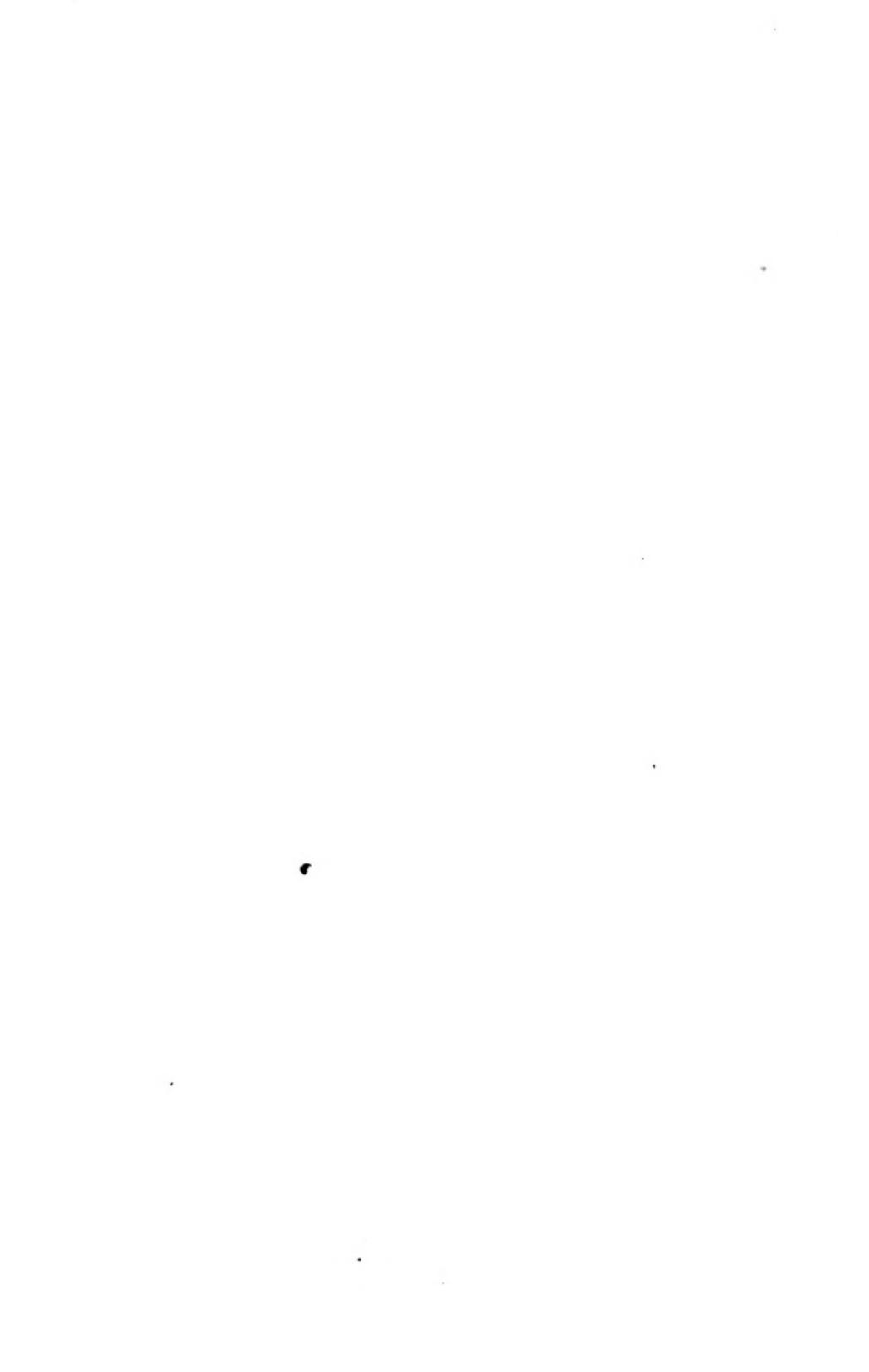
“ How mildly on the wand’ring cloud
The sunset beam is cast !
’Tis like the memory left behind,
When loved ones breathe their last.

“ And soon the morning’s gladsome light
Their glory shall restore,
And eyelids that are seal’d in death
Shall wake to close no more.”

“Behold, the noon-day sun of life
Doth seek its western bound,
And fast the length’ning shadows cast
A heavier gloom around ;
And all the glow-worm lamps are dead
That, kindling round our way,
Gave fickle promises of joy ;
‘ Abide with us, we pray !’

Dim eve draws on, and many a friend,
Our early path that blest,
Wrapt in the cerements of the tomb,
Have laid them down to rest ;
But THOU, the everlasting Friend,
Whose Spirit’s glorious ray
Can gild the dreary vale of death,
‘ Abide with us, we pray !’”

“ ABIDE WITH US, FOR IT IS TOWARD EVENING, AND
THE DAY IS FAR SPENT.”



2.91

