BX
7233
.B87
T8
1830

UNIVERSITY OF PRINCETON
DEC 15 1995
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BX
7233
.B87
T8
1830

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

http://www.archive.org/details/twelvesermonstoa00burd

TWELVE

SERMONS TO THE AGED.

BY REV. GEORGE BURDER,

AUTHOR OF VILLAGE SERMONS, COTTAGE SERMONS, &c.

PUBLISHED BY THE

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

No. 144 Nassau-street New-York.

TWELVE

SERMONS TO THE AGED.

BY REV. GEORGE BURDER,

AUTHOR OF VILLAGE SERMONS, COTTAGE SERMONS, &c.

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
SEP 11 1992
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PUBLISHED BY THE

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

No. 144 Nassau-street New-York.

1830

CONTENTS

No. 1.—THE INFIRMITIES OF AGE.

Eccles. 12 : 1.—The years—when thou shalt say—I have no pleasure in them.

No. 2.—CHRISTIAN PATIENCE.

Heb. 10 : 36.—For ye have need of patience.

No. 3.—PENITENT REFLECTIONS.

Gen. 41 : 9.—I do remember my faults this day.

No. 4.—GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS.

Psalm 103 : 2.—Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

No. 5.—THE CONVERSION OF MANASSEH.

2 *Chron.* 33 : 12, 13.—And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and 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 the Lord he was God.

No. 6.—THE DUTIES OF THE AGED.

Titus, 2 : 2.—That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

No. 7.—DOUBTS AND FEARS REPROVED.

Isa. 40 : 27—31.—Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not

known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength; even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

No. 8.—THE VANITY OF THE WORLD.

Eccles. 1 : 2.—Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

No. 9.—THE RIGHTEOUS NOT FORSAKEN.

Psalm 71 : 9.—Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

No. 10.—THE AGED PILGRIM.

Gen. 47 : 8, 9.—And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

No. 11.—PEACE IN DEATH; OR, SIMEON'S SONG.

Luke, 2 : 29, 30.—Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

No. 12.—THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST PRAYER

Acts, 7 : 59.—Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

THE INFIRMITIES OF AGE.

The years—when thou shalt say—I have no pleasure in them.—Eccl. 12 : 1.

When Solomon, the wisest of men, exhorted the young to "remember their Creator in the days of their youth," he gave this good reason for it—that the season of youth was a more favorable time for religion than the season of age; for old people generally find their "last days" to be "evil days"—so full of pain and trouble that they have little or no pleasure in them.

It is a sad thing that so few young people take Solomon's advice: they are too apt to *forget* God, and to put off the great concerns of their souls from year to year; they foolishly think that it will be time enough to serve God when they are old: but if they live to be old, they will find their mistake, and that they are less fit to serve him than ever; for the bad habits of the aged are so confirmed, their hearts have become so hard, and their infirmities so great, that they are forced to say: All our pleasures are dead and gone, and we feel ourselves fit for nothing, and especially unfit for those great duties of religion which ought to have been our first and chief concern;

for the care of the soul is certainly, "the one thing needful."

While, however, there is life, there is hope; and although "the evil days are come," and the pleasures of sense are gone; yet, by the grace of God, it is possible that the pains and infirmities you feel may lead you to serious reflection on the sins and follies of your past days; may lead you to true repentance for your offences; and to earnest prayer to God for his pardoning mercy through Jesus Christ, and for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to renew and sanctify your hearts, and make you fit for a better world.

To assist you in these endeavors, we shall, *First*, Take a view of the infirmities of old age; and, *Secondly*, Show you what are the lessons which you ought to learn from them.

King Solomon, who was a wise observer of human nature, and who is said to have been old himself when he wrote this book, gives us, in the verses after the text, a full description of the infirmities of age, expressed in what is called a figurative manner, the substance of which is easily understood, though, from not knowing perfectly the customs, or the proverbial sayings, to which he alludes, we may not be able exactly to explain every part of them.

In the second verse Solomon describes old age by the darkening of the sun, the moon, and the stars; and the return of the clouds after the rain. When thick and heavy clouds obscure the cheerful light of the sun by day, or of the moon and stars by night,

people complain of the dulness of the weather, as it checks their pursuits both of business and pleasure; and thus it is in old age: afflictions of body and troubles of mind often produce a gloom; the days are dull, the nights are wearisome, and none of that pleasure is felt which the young, who have health, strength, and lively spirits, generally enjoy. And then, it is added, "the clouds return after the rain"—that is, one pain and affliction succeeds another, as the clouds often do in a rainy season. In showery weather, the clouds sometimes disperse, the clear shining of the sun succeeds for a little while; but soon the sky is overcast again, and a heavy shower descends. And thus in old age; painful disorders are sometimes remitted; and the hope that health is returning is indulged; but, alas! the interval of ease is short; the pain is renewed—"the clouds return after the rain."

Another infirmity of age is thus expressed: "The keepers of the house tremble"—the hands and arms, like faithful watchmen, were always ready to defend the body from assaults and dangers; but these become feeble; are sometimes tremulous by palsey; and can no longer prove a sufficient guard from assaults or accidents. In like manner, "the strong men bow themselves." The legs and thighs, which, in youth, were like strong men, able to bear a heavy burden, are now become feeble, and too weak to bear the weight of the body, which totters from side to side, and without assistance, is in danger of falling to the ground. The foresight of such a state led the

Psalmist to pray, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth."

The failure of the teeth, so useful in preparing the food for its digestion in the stomach, is another infirmity of age, which the wise man thus expresses; "The grinders shall cease because they are few:" the teeth which, in youth, grind the food like the stones in a corn-mill, are decayed, or loose, or totally lost; so that some kinds of food cannot be eaten at all, and others are very imperfectly prepared for the stomach.

In old age the sight usually fails more or less, and, in many mournful cases, is totally lost. Solomon thus describes this affliction, "Those who look out of the windows are darkened." The eyes have been justly called "the windows of the soul." From these windows, the mind surveys with pleasure the faces of dear relations and friends, and the delightful prospects of nature; discovers the approaches of danger, and reads the page of instruction. But all these sources of pleasure and safety are closed; the day is gone; the night, the long dark night, which will know no morning in this life, is come; and half the world, as to our enjoyment of it, is shut out for the rest of our days.

"The doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low." There seems to be an allusion here to the custom of the ancients, who, early in the morning, as soon as the doors of the house were opened, ground their corn for the day, in a hand-mill. If this refers to the grinding of food

by the teeth, then it may signify the want of appetite, and the refusal of food. Or it may signify their loving to stay at home, and keeping the doors of the house shut, to prevent being disturbed by company. Others think it refers to "the door of the lips," and the aversion of aged people to speak much, especially in public.

"And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird." Old Age is usually wakeful. Sleep, "the sweet restorer of wearied nature," often departs from the eyes of the aged; or if they sleep, they are easily disturbed. Even the crowing of the cock, or the chirping of the birds, will awake them; and often, unable to rest, and tired of bed, they will rise at a very early hour.

"And all the daughters of music shall be brought low." Age generally loses its relish for music and singing. That which was, perhaps, a great delight, becomes rather a burden; the breathing is short and the voice is tremulous. Aged Barzillai, whom king David would have taken to court, declined the proposal, saying, "I am this day fourscore years old—can I hear any more the voice of singing men, and singing women? wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden to my lord the king.

Another token of old age is, "They shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way." Steep ascents are very difficult to the aged; a hill alarms their fears, for it threatens to produce much pain and weariness. Travelling now seems formidable to them. The young are often too bold,

and venture into needless dangers; and the old are too timorous, and full of fear lest mischief should befall them. They prefer, therefore, staying at home, and not exposing themselves to harm abroad.

"The almond tree shall flourish." The almond tree, with its white blossoms, is a beautiful emblem of the hoary head. Gray or white hairs are the common symptoms of age, and may be considered as truly ornamental; for "the glory of young men is their strength, and the beauty and honor of old men is the gray head." Prov. 20: 29. God himself put honor upon it in the law, saying, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord." Levit. 19: 32. But let the aged remember that these blossoms are certain intimations of the approach of death: they have been called "churchyard flowers," which, as one says, "may serve to them that bear them, instead of passing bells, to give them certain notice whither they are shortly going."

"And the grasshopper shall be a burden." This signifies the extreme feebleness of the aged, when the lightest thing may be a load; when reduced to such weakness and nervous sensibility that the least inconvenience, though it may be as trifling as the weight or the chirping of an insect, may vex and fret them.

"And desire shall fail." Those animal passions and desires which in youth were so strong and violent, and too often the occasion of so much sin,

now gradually decline, as years increase and strength decays. And it is well it is so, for now it is high time to get the heart weaned from the world and a life of sense, and to "set the affections upon things above."

"Then shall the silver cord be loosed—the golden bowl broken—the pitcher be broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern." The whole verse seems to be a description of the functions of life taken from a well where there is a cord to the bowl or bucket, with which the water is drawn up; a wheel, by which more easily to raise it; a cistern into which it may be poured; and a pitcher or vessel to carry it away with: but now all these are broken and become useless. Thus, at death, the lungs cease to play, the heart ceases to beat, the blood to circulate; the whole surprising contrivance for forming and circulating the blood, from the fountain of the heart to every extremity of the body, is now entirely deranged.*

What follows this derangement? "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." "Then, man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

"How solemn are these words! They demand our most serious attention. When death takes place, a separation is made between the mortal body and the immortal spirit. The body, soon corrupt, must be buried out of sight, and quickly returns to

* Scott's Commentary.

its mother—earth. But the spirit—the immortal spirit!—what becomes of that? Does it cease to exist? No: "It returns to God who gave it," to be disposed of according to his holy and sovereign pleasure. If the spirit had been renewed by grace, and made meet for glory, it departs from the body to be with Christ—"absent from the body, present with the Lord;" for "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." But if the sinner die in a graceless state, unpardoned and unrenewed, it sinks into endless perdition. The spirits of the just are made perfect, and immediately pass into glory; but the spirits of the wicked "go to their own place," as Judas did, and, with the ungodly rich man in the parable, are tormented.

"The mourners go about the streets." Most men die lamented by some, either sincerely, or in appearance. A funeral is a solemn sight, and ought to be conducted and viewed with deep seriousness. The mourners are conveying a dear relation, a kind friend, or a valued neighbor, to his "*long home*"—so the grave is here, with great propriety, styled his *long* home. The deceased had, perhaps, resided in various dwellings, during the course of a long life. He removed from one habitation to another, as occasion required; but the grave is his last, his long home. Thus, as Job speaks, "Man lieth down, and riseth not till the heavens be no more: they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." But, as St. Paul assures us, "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised;" and then, saith Job,

"Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands." Job, 14: 12—15.

II. Let us now consider what are the lessons which the infirmities of age ought to teach us.

In the first place they teach us the evil of sin. If sin had not entered into the world, these infirmities would not have been known. There would have been no pains and achs, no failure of hearing and sight, no wearisome days, no sleepless nights. These are all the fruits and effects of sin. If man had not sinned, he would not have suffered by age, any more than angels do: they have lived many thousand years, and they still enjoy all the vigor of youth; but man lives several years before he attains maturity; his manly vigor lasts but a little while, and then he fades like a leaf, or withers like a flower; "The wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof knoweth it no more." Surely, then, the aged man should reflect on the evil of sin, which is the sad cause of all his sufferings; for sin is the disease, and all our afflictions are but the symptoms of it. In some cases the aged may perceive that particular sufferings are the effects of particular sins; and may cry, with one of old, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth; (Job, 13: 26;) or, as it is in another place, "His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." Job, 20: 11.

The certain approach of death is another lesson

taught by the infirmities of age. The young *may* die, but the aged *must*. Death *may* be near a man at any age; but it *must* be very near the old man. "As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between thee and death." It is at the door. Do not you hear it knock? Your aching limbs, your failing sight, your trembling hand, are all certain signs of the great approaching change. Are you, then, prepared to die? Have you believed in Christ? Have you, as a guilty sinner, fled to him for refuge? Has your heart been renewed by grace? Are you become "a new creature in Christ Jesus?" Are you "made meet," by the spirit of God, "for the inheritance of the saints in light?"

These are some of the questions which you ought to ask yourselves. Put these questions to your hearts, and rest not without honest answers to them. If you have neglected the care of your soul till now, how deeply should you repent the shameful delay; and how earnest should you be in your prayers for the pardoning mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, that now, though it be so late, even at the eleventh hour, you may obtain the salvation you have hitherto slighted and refused. Not a moment more must be lost. O then, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

But let the believer rejoice; for his redemption

draweth nigh. It is nearer than when he first believed. While you remain in the body, Christ will continue to support and comfort you. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above what you are able to bear. As your day is, so shall your strength be. God will give you patience to endure all your pains and infirmities; and he has said, I will never, never leave nor forsake you; and then, in his own good time, he will relieve you from the burden of the flesh, and give you an abundant entrance into his eternal kingdom and glory.

Yet a season, and you know
Happy entrance will be given;
All our sorrows left below,
And earth exchang'd for heaven.

PRAYER.

Eternal God: thou hast been the dwelling-place of thy people in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God; but thou turnest men to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men. Thou didst make man upright, in thy own holy image; but soon man fell by his transgression, and was doomed to death. By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so that death passeth upon all men, for that all have sinned: and death is

often preceded by a long train of infirmities and diseases, especially in old age. If the days of our years exceed three score years and ten, they become labor and sorrow. O sanctify these sorrows to thy servant. May they embitter sin; may they cause me to turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; may they wean me from this vain world, which I must soon leave. May all the sins of a long life be pardoned, through faith in the blood of Jesus; and may the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier, renew my soul, and make it meet for the heavenly inheritance. These blessings I do earnestly desire, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the only Mediator and Advocate; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

In age and feebleness extreme,
Who shall a helpless worm redeem?
Jesus, my only hope thou art,
Strength of my failing flesh and heart!
O could I catch a smile from Thee,
And drop into eternity!

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

CHRISTIAN PATIENCE.

For ye have need of Patience.—Heb. 10:36.

"MAN is born to trouble:" it is his lot, and he cannot avoid it. He *may* have need of patience at any time of life; but in old age he is sure to need it. Youth is the season of activity and pleasure; but old age is usually the season of pain and suffering; and then patience becomes more necessary than ever. Trials and troubles usually abound more in the close of life than at any former period; and one great design of God in sending them, is to produce patience. St. Paul says, "Tribulation worketh patience;" it gives occasion for it, and it is overruled to beget, improve, and confirm a quiet submission to the afflicting hand of God; and when "patience has its proper and perfect work," it produces *experience*—an experience of the power and grace of God, in supporting and comforting us under the rod; and of the sincerity and uprightness of our hearts in submitting to it: all which tends to increase and confirm "the hope of glory" through Jesus Christ.

Patience is a grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby a

Christian endures, with calmness of mind, and quiet submission to the will of God, those sufferings which he is pleased to permit.

It stands opposed to the pride, rebellion, and stubbornness, which resent the visitation; fret and murmur; complain of it as hard, cruel, and unjust; and sometimes resort to sinful means of getting relief. How many afflicted persons, instead of exercising or praying for patience, fly to vain and hurtful amusements for help; and others seek a miserable refuge in strong drink—the bane and the ruin of thousands, both in body and soul; while others, impatient to the utmost degree, put an end to their earthly existence.

Sinful impatience is compared in Scripture to the rage of "a wild bull caught in a net," or to the struggles of an ox not used to draw the plough. Thus it once was with Ephraim, as mentioned in Jeremiah, 31:18, &c. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke,"—he was like an unruly beast, not used to the yoke, and unwilling to bear it, but resenting the confinement, disliking the labor, and therefore kicking against the goads used by the driver, which only made the suffering greater. But a happy change took place in Ephraim, as it follows: "Surely after that I was instructed and turned"—taught of God, and converted to God, then "I smote on my thigh," as the penitent publican did on his breast—"I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear

the reproach of my youth." Observe that the *sin* of youth is the *reproach* of youth; it is their shame and disgrace, though too often they glory in their shame; but if aged men are converted men, they will be penitent men; and if penitent, they will be patient, and reconciled to the rod of affliction with which they are chastised. Such a disposition is pleasing to God, who is styled "The God of Patience," and who says to every penitent, as to Ephraim, verse 20, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord!" Now, to promote this disposition, let the following things be considered.

The patience we recommend, arises from

1. The belief of a divine providence;

2. Sincere humiliation for sin; and

3. Hope in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ.

1. A firm belief of the providence of God is necessary to patience. The great God who made the world, rules and governs it. He preserves and governs all his creatures; nothing is left to chance: indeed there is no such thing as chance; chance and fortune are heathenish terms, not fit for the lips of Christians. Nothing can take place without the notice and permission of God. He condescends to regard all the concerns of men, even those which seem to be little and trifling. Jesus Christ, when he exhorted his disciples not to fear the wrath of man, said to

them, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." This is to teach us that the providence of God extends to every thing, however little and trifling it may seem to be. But what is little? That which seems to be so, may be an important link in the great chain of events. Joseph's dreams might seem trifles: his telling them to his brethren; the merchants passing by just when they had put him in the pit; their buying him, and taking him into Egypt—all these things might seem trifles, but they tended to great events—even to the advancement of Joseph, the preservation of Jacob's whole family, the oppression of their posterity, their miraculous deliverance, and their final settlement in the promised land, and thus, to the fulfilment of God's designs and predictions. Had the merchants passed by the pit an hour sooner or an hour later, the chain would have been broken. And it often happens that the greatest events of our lives turn upon a point that seems, at the moment, of no importance.

Nothing appears to be more casual than casting a lot; but this is not unnoticed. Solomon says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Prov. 16:33. When Ahab, king of Israel, ventured, notwithstanding he was warned against it by the prophet, to go to battle against the Syrians; and although he disguised himself that he might not be known, yet he was slain, and that by a man who "drew a bow at a venture:" but the

providence of God directed the arrow, and it entered his body, "through the joints of his armour," in which, perhaps, he trusted; and he died according to the word of God. 1 Kings, 22.

God is the author of our lives, and "in him we live, and move, and have our being." He determined the time of our birth; the country in which we should be born; the parents from whom we should descend: and all the circumstances of our education, connections, and employments in life. It is he who gives us "our daily bread," preserves us from sickness, or restores us to health. All our troubles and afflictions are under his control; and, if we are his children, he will be our guide unto death, our support when dying, and our everlasting portion beyond the grave.

All this is a foundation for patience: and thus we find that holy men of old reasoned, when heavy troubles befell them. When Job, so celebrated for his patience, lost all his great property, and all his ten children in one day, he refers all to the providence of God, saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He might have referred to the three parties of the Chaldeans who murdered his servants and stole his cattle; but he resolves it all into the holy and sovereign will of God. He who gave him these great possessions, had taken them away: but his loss was far from making him impatient; he blesses the name of the Lord. Many an aged person may number, among his afflictions, the loss of that pro-

perty which he once possessed, and which he hoped would have been the support of his age; but it is lost and gone, and painful poverty has succeeded: or he may mourn the loss of a beloved wife, or affectionate children; but let him imitate Job, calmly submit to the holy will of God, and bless Him who takes away, as well as Him who gave.

When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, the high-priest, were suddenly destroyed, for their presumption, by fire from the Lord, the bereaved father, though doubtless deeply affected by the awful event, dared not murmur, but submitted silently to the awful stroke—"Aaron held his peace."

When David, king of Israel, was driven from Jerusalem by the rebellion of his son Absalom, and was in danger of losing his life as well as his crown, this was the expression of his patience: "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." Thus it becomes us to bow to the Sovereign Disposer of all things; the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right. "God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." "Just and true are all thy ways, O King of saints." Who art thou then, worm of the earth, "that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honor, and another to dis-

honor?" Hear, then, his voice, when tempted to murmur or complain;—"Be still, and know that I am God."

2. Sincere humiliation for sin contributes much to patience. "God looketh upon men" when afflicted, and observes the temper of their minds; "and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not, he will deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light." Job, 33: 27, 28. Yes, "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more." Job, 34: 31. A true and deep conviction of our sin, the sinfulness of our nature, and the transgressions of our lives, will reconcile us to the cross. We shall not think that God treats us with severity, but sincerely say, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." No, far from it: "He hath punished us less than our iniquities have deserved." An aged sinner may justly say, How many are in hell, who never sinned so much, nor so long as I have done; they are taken, but I am left; God has given me time and space for repentance, and this affliction loudly calls me to it. O that I may "hear the rod, and him who hath appointed it."

Consider that question proposed by the prophet Jeremiah, (Lam. 3: 39) "Wherefore doth a living man complain—a man for the punishment of his sins?" Sinners must repent, not repine. We are yet *living* men; and while there is life, there is

hope. "In the day of adversity, consider;" and instead of complaining, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord."

If sin has become bitter to us, if we abhor ourselves on account of it, we shall welcome the cross which is intended to "destroy the body of sin," "to crucify the old man, with his affections and lusts," and to make us "partakers of God's holy nature." "Well, then, may the aged and afflicted penitent say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him."

3. Hope in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, will greatly promote the exercise of patience.

The penitent sinner who, under a sense of his guilt, and exposure to the wrath of a holy and just God, has "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before him" in the Gospel; who has by faith "received the atonement," and is thus reconciled to God through the blood of Christ, may indulge a good hope of salvation; for the gracious Redeemer, on whose faithful word we may safely rely, hath said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." If, then, we are the children of God, through faith in Jesus, God "dealeth with us as his children" when he afflicts us. The rod is no proof of his anger, but of his love; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Most children need correction: all God's children do; therefore he will not withhold the rod. "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not

sons." So St. Paul, writing to the afflicted and persecuted Hebrews who believed in Jesus Christ, makes use of the following argument: "We have had fathers of our *flesh* who corrected us, and we gave *them* reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of *Spirits*, and live? for they verily chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit"—and oh how great the profit! let it be duly prized, "that we might be partakers of his holiness"—that we might be more and more conformed to his own holy image and will in the present world, and hereafter attain a sinless perfection in the world to come. See the 12th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, verse 5th to the 12th.

Afflictions are not, "*for the present*, joyous, but grievous;"—they may be hard to bear; but we must look forward: "AFTERWARD they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness." For this we must pray and wait. Look at the farmer, and imitate his example: so St. James directs: "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." When the farmer has sown his wheat he does not expect an immediate harvest. He has long patience, he waits many months; and when the appointed weeks of harvest arrive, he reaps the crop with joy, and feels that all his toil, and all his expense, and all his patience, are well repaid. And thus shall it be with the afflicted Christian. "He

went forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and he shall, doubtless, come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him," He shall reap "the peaceable fruits of righteousness," which are by Jesus Christ to the glory of God, and his own spiritual and eternal advantage.

To conclude: "Let patience have its perfect work"—let it take its own proper course without interruption; and if the affliction that calls for it continue long, let patience also be continued; "that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing;" for patience is necessary to complete the Christian character; and he is the most eminent Christian who is the most patient. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, for an example of suffering affliction and patience. Behold, we count them happy which *endure*," that is, who bear their trials with resignation, faith, and patience. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord—that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." God supported him in his heavy trials, and at length gave him a happy issue out of all his afflictions. He doubled his former enjoyments, and gave a glorious testimony to his piety. The same Lord is still equally pitiful to all his children; and if he do not crown every believer's patience with outward prosperity, like Job's, he will do far more and better, he will give each of them "a crown of righteousness which shall not fade away."

St. Paul was a great and patient sufferer; and thus we find him reasoning: "I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be

compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And in another place he goes still further, and says, "Our *light* affliction, (so he calls his heavy trials,) which is but for a *moment*, (so he speaks of his long-continued persecutions,) worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The heaviest trial was light, and the longest trial was short; not in itself, but when compared with the eternal glories of the heavenly world. Then shall it be said of those patient sufferers, "These are they who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne: they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

PRAYER.

Holy Father, thou art the God of the spirits of all flesh, and hatest nothing that thou hast made; yet thou art pleased to permit great and sore troubles to befall thy children. But thou art righteous in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works. O suffer me not to murmur or complain, for I am conscious that my sins deserve far severer treatment. May I find that it is good, though it be not pleasant, to be afflicted. May tribulation work patience and experience and hope; yea, all the peaceable fruits of righteousness, that I may be more fully a partaker of thy holiness. If affliction abound, let thy conso-

lations much more abound. Cheer my heart with the hope of pardon and acceptance through Jesus Christ. May thy Holy Spirit bear witness with my spirit that I am a child of God and an heir of glory. Let the present distress be moderated, and, if it please thee, removed; that health of body and peace of mind may again be enjoyed. Yet, O Lord, I desire to say, not my will, but thine, be done. May patience have its perfect work, and when the days of my affliction are concluded, admit me to that happy and holy world, in which the inhabitants shall not say, I am sick; where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people, and the days of their mourning shall be ended.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

PENITENT REFLECTIONS.

I do remember my faults this day.—Genesis, 41:9.

Memory is a most valuable faculty of the human mind, and of the most important use in all the concerns of life. It is the storehouse of our knowledge, without which all our acquirements would be lost. It supplies materials to direct our judgment in the management of all our affairs, and teaches us to avoid many threatening dangers; it is also a source of great delight, enabling us to enjoy anew the pleasures of former years: but it is also the frequent source of painful feelings, by renewing the sorrows of our past days. Memory, however, is the greatest benefit when employed in the service of religion, when we "remember our Creator," his holy will, and his righteous law, and are thereby led to review our sins with that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life.

Of this kind was that act of memory which is mentioned in our text. The person who here says, "I remember my faults this day," was the chief butler in the household of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He, and another officer of the household, the chief baker, were put into prison at the same time; and

they both dreamed on the same night, but were not able to interpret their dreams. Joseph, a son of Jacob, was a prisoner in the same jail, under the false charge of a wicked woman. He was understood to be an interpreter of dreams, and to him both the butler and the baker referred, wishing to know the meaning of their respective dreams. Joseph gave this solution—that the butler should be restored to his post, but that the baker should be executed as a criminal. Both these events came to pass. Now Joseph, when he foretold the restoration of the butler, made this reasonable request. "Think on me when it shall be well with thee; and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me; and make mention of my name unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house."

Did the butler regard his request? Did he remember Joseph? No, "he forgot Joseph." Two full years passed over before he recollected his promise to him. It was not until king Pharaoh himself had a dream, which none of his wise men were able to interpret, that Joseph came into the ungrateful butler's mind; and he said, "I do remember my fault this day." It was the fault of ingratitude, and a breach of promise: and ingratitude is a great sin. Alas! how common is it, and how often do those who rise in the world forget their poor neighbors, perhaps their poor relations! Themselves at ease, they forget those who are in trouble—themselves in prosperity, they forget those in adversity.

The butler owns that it was a *fault;* and if ingra-

titude to *men* be a fault, how much greater a fault is ingratitude to God, when we "forget all his benefits," all that goodness which ought to lead us to repentance!

We may take occasion, from these words, to observe:

1. That we are all chargeable with many faults.

2. That we are too apt to forget them.

3. That there are various times and occasions which ought to bring them to mind, and that this is especially necessary for aged persons.

1. It is a certain truth that we are justly chargeable with many faults. Few will deny that they have committed faults against their fellow-creatures, against parents, masters, husbands, wives, children, or neighbors; and those ought to occasion heartfelt sorrow. But our worst faults are our sins against God. These should affect our minds still more deeply, and fill us with godly sorrow, as they did the royal penitent, Psalm 51. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." So the penitent Prodigal, who had been an undutiful son, says, "I have sinned *against Heaven*, and before thee." He acknowledges his sin against God first, as the greatest evil of the two.

If we would rightly judge of our sins, we must not compare ourselves with other sinners, but with the divine standard—the holy law of God, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." That law extends to the heart, and condemns every evil thought, as our Savior largely shows in his sermon on the mount,

where heart-murder and heart-adultery are condemned. And it was in this way that Paul, once a proud pharisee, who thought himself righteous, was convinced of his sin, and humbled for it; for he says, "I had not known sin unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Why did this commandment convince and condemn him more than the other nine? It was because it reached the heart; because it condemned an unholy thought—a sinful desire. This opened his eyes; "the commandment came" with power to his conscience; "sin revived," and he adds, "I died." The law did its office; it "slew him;" he saw that he was a dead man, according to that law in which he had before trusted and boasted; and then he was glad to be saved by grace—to owe his salvation entirely to the free mercy of God, through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Take a view of the holy law, as contained in the ten commandments, and examine yourself by each of them. Ask yourself these questions:

Have I studied to know God, as the only true God, and my God? Have I endeavored to worship and glorify him, to pray to him, to praise him, to please him, and to trust in him?

Have I attended to his worship, and the ordinances appointed in his word; to secret prayer, family prayer, public prayer, and hearing his Gospel?

Have I always reverenced the name of God, not using it profanely or lightly in common conversation, mindful of those awful words, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain?"

Have I remembered the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy, abstaining, all that day, from all works except those of necessity and mercy; and spending the whole time in public or private exercises of divine worship? or have I sinfully and foolishly spent my Sabbaths in idleness, and worldly amusements, or intemperance?

Did I honor my father and mother as I ought; obeying their commands, observing their advice, and paying due respect to all my superiors and inferiors, or my equals?

Have I used all lawful means to preserve my own life and health, and that of others; and to abstain from violent anger, which might be even dangerous to the life or welfare of my neighbors?

Have I been chaste, avoiding youthful and fleshly lusts and practices, which "war against the soul," knowing that fornicators and adulterers God will judge? or, am I chargeable with abominable actions which defile the soul and provoke a holy God to anger? Have I been the unhappy instrument of involving others in the same guilt—others who are now, perhaps, dead, and whose state is fixed for ever in the eternal world? And if I have been kept from the grosser acts of evil, have I not indulged iniquity in my heart, and been guilty of ten thousand secret and speculative sins?

Have I been uniformly and universally honest as a tradesman, as a master, or as a servant? Do I abhor every species and degree of dishonesty, of over-reaching or defrauding any person in any of my dealings?

Have I constantly maintained truth, not only when I may have taken an oath, but in common conversation, in relating facts, and in speaking of characters? Have I always been cautious in making promises, and very careful in keeping them?

Have I been contented with the condition which God has been pleased to allot me, however poor or distressing, believing that he orders all things for the best? And do I avoid, as much as possible, envying the happiness of my neighbor, or inordinately desiring any thing that is his?

Let the reader make a pause, and try himself by each of these ten commandments, and he will find abundant cause to say, "Lord, have mercy upon me, and incline my heart to keep this law;" "Lord, have mercy upon me, and write all these thy laws in my heart, I beseech thee." "I do remember my faults this day."

But it is not only the recital of the *holy law* which should excite contrition; God has been pleased also to give us his *holy Gospel*, which is called "*the law of faith*"—the divinely-appointed and only method of salvation, which requires our obedience as much as the law, and the rejection of which is of all sins the most heinous and destructive; even as our Savior himself speaks, (John, 3:18,) "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Let the reader then ask himself, "Do I believe on the Son of God? Do I, believing that I am a fallen,

guilty, helpless sinner, believe the testimony of God in his Gospel, that Jesus Christ is the only, the all-sufficient Savior—that he came into the world to save sinners—that he suffered and died, the just for the unjust; that God is reconciled to the world through him—that through him whosoever believes shall be pardoned and justified, however many and great his sins have been—and that none who come to God by him shall be rejected? Do I then believe the general promises in my own particular case, and look to Christ as *my* Savior, committing my precious soul to his care, trusting in him alone, and endeavoring to rely upon him confidently for eternal salvation?" If I can do this, I may remember my faults with godly sorrow, but not with despair, "looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

2. We observed, at the beginning of this discourse, that we are too apt to forget our faults.

An honest man will not forget the debts he owes to his neighbor; but, oh, how few remember what debtors they are to God! And this is no wonder, if we consider the careless and ungodly lives of sinners. If they kept the Sabbath, attended on the public worship of God, and read the Scriptures at home, they would be reminded of their sins. If they prayed in private, as all Christians do, they could not forget their iniquities. But if worldly business employs most of their time, and the rest is spent at the ale-house or the theatre, or in the company of the wicked, who

glory in their shame, we cannot wonder that thus forgetting God, they forget both their duty to him and their offences against him. But that this may not continue to be the case, let us proceed to observe:—

3. There are times and occasions which ought to bring sins to remembrance, and especially the time of old age.

The means of grace, as we have already noticed, should certainly have this effect: prayer includes the confession of sin; and a serious perusal of the Bible, and the faithful ministry of the word, cannot fail to remind us of our faults.

The observation of the sins of others all around us will forcibly remind us of our own transgressions; and the aged person will see, with heartfelt grief, the sins of his youth acted over again by the rising generation. It is recorded of a holy martyr, that when he saw a criminal led to execution, he would say, "There goes John Bradford, had it not been for the grace of God." "Who maketh thee to differ?" "By the grace of God," said St. Paul, "I am what I am."

Afflictions are often the means of humbling the soul for sin. When God sends some sharp affliction to try us, we may say to it, as the woman of old did to the prophet, "Art thou come to call my sins to remembrance?" Or, as another penitent speaks, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth." And happy is that affliction which thus humbles the soul.

"Then shall I sing, O happy rod,
"That brought me nearer to my God."

The apprehension of the approach of death will, above all other occasions, tend to bring sin to remembrance. It is generally, though not constantly found, that

"Men may *live* fools, but fools they cannot *die*."

The conscience, however dormant before, now awakes, and the most ungodly will then resort to religion, or at least to the forms of it, however neglected and despised before, as their last refuge. Solemn and awful, beyond expression, is the thought of appearing before a holy and justly offended God, and entering into the unknown and eternal state, to receive according to what we have done in the body. Even the heathen sailors in the ship with Jonah, when they dreaded shipwreck and death, "cried every man to his god."

But let not the great concern be put off to that awful period. Dying persons have often expressed their total inability rightly to consider their state before God, or to prepare for the approaching change. Let every reader, then, *now* call his sins to remembrance, and humble himself, as in dust and ashes, before God. "Let the wicked forsake," as well as remember, "his way; and let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

"If we confess our sins with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, we shall obtain forgiveness

of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let the penitent sinner lift up his weeping eyes to the cross of Jesus: let him, as directed by the Gospel, "behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world; who died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God;" and if we thus come to him, and believe on him, his precious blood will cleanse us from all our sins: we "shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Thrice happy is the aged penitent who has thus remembered his sins, and obtained the pardon of them through the free grace of God. The penitent will still "remember them and be ashamed, although God be pacified toward him for all that he hath done;" but he is interested in that new covenant of grace in which the Lord saith, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness; their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

PRAYER.

O holy and gracious God, I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. When I reflect on the years that are past, I blush and am ashamed to lift up my face; and if thou, Lord, shouldest mark my iniquities, I can never stand. Innumerable evils have compassed me about; they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart

faileth me. I have sinned in every stage of life, from my youth up; I have sinned in every station and relation of life. I have sinned against light and love, against calls and warnings, against convictions and resolutions. The remembrance of my sins is grievous, the burden of them is intolerable. God be merciful to me a sinner; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out the multitude of my sins. Is there not forgiveness with thee, O God, that thou mayest be feared? Is not the blood of thy dear Son sufficient to wash me from all my guilt? For his sake, O God, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. And O give me thy Holy Spirit to purify my heart and renew my spirit, that hereafter I may hate every false way, and serve thee with body, soul, and spirit, all the rest of my days. And this I ask in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

Show pity, Lord! O Lord, forgive!
Let a repenting rebel live;
Are not thy mercies large and free?
May not a sinner trust in thee?

My crimes are great, but don't surpass
The power and glory of thy grace;
Great God! thy nature hath no bound,
So let thy pardoning love be found.

O wash my soul from every sin,
And make my guilty conscience clean;

Here on my heart the burden lies,
And past offences pain my eyes.

My lips, with shame, my sins confess
Against thy law, against thy grace:
Lord, should thy judgments grow severe,
I am condemn'd, but thou art clear.

Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death;
And if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well.

Yet save a trembling sinner, Lord,
Whose hope, still hovering round thy word,
Would light on some sweet promise there,
Some sure support against despair.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.—Psalm 103 : 2.

AGED persons generally complain of the failure of their memory; it is one of the most usual infirmities of advanced life. The names of persons and places are often forgotten; and although the events of youth are distinctly recollected, the transactions of the past day, perhaps of the last hour, are lost. This defect of memory is a source of pain and inconvenience, and is, therefore, frequently lamented. But it is not only in the affairs of time and sense that this failure takes place; it becomes a greater evil in reference to our spiritual concerns, and should therefore be guarded against, or repaired, as much as possible. In the affairs of the world we often take pains to recall to mind what we had forgotten, and we frequently succeed. Thus let us act in regard to spiritual things; and thus our text informs us that the holy Psalmist acted. In this sacred and encouraging Psalm, he awakens and stirs up his soul to the joyful task; he calls forth "all that is within him"—all his powers and faculties, to unite in this

sacred song, (verse 1,) and in the text he repeats the summons, and calls in memory to his aid; he invites the power of recollection to furnish matter for praise; for, alas! we are all too apt to forget benefits received. It was the complaint of some persons in ancient times, that "injuries were written in marble, but benefits in sand;" the former were never forgotten, the latter seldom remembered. This is too often the case still, even as it regards our fellow-creatures. Ingratitude to man is no uncommon fault; but we are far more prone to forget the greater benefits that a gracious God has conferred upon us. We should, therefore, stir up our souls to the duty of praise; and let the aged man say thus to himself, "O my soul, to thy shame be it spoken, thou hast forgotten many of his benefits; but surely thou wilt not forget them *all*, for thou shouldest not have forgotten any." This, then, is what we shall urge in the present discourse.

Aged people should review their past years, and recollect with gratitude the goodness of God to them.

Look back to INFANCY. What a feeble creature is the human infant! more helpless than the young of any animal. Many creatures can shift for themselves from the beginning of life, but little children are long dependant on a mother's care—a care exercised for years before the date of their remembrance; and O how much is due to a mother for her care and kindness, for her restless nights and wearisome days! What anxiety to guard from danger, to nurse in

illness, to feed, and clothe, and soothe the darling child! But all this we owe to the God of nature, who implanted this tenderness in the maternal breast, and who gave his blessing to her efforts for the preservation of life. Thus the Psalmist ascribes the support of his infancy to divine goodness, (Ps. 22:9, 10,) "Thou art he who took me out of the womb; thou art my God from my mother's bowels. I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's bowels."

Forget not the benefits of God in your early CHILDHOOD. More than half the children born into the world die before they are seven years of age. Many and severe are the diseases of childhood, which few wholly escape, and which prove fatal to a large proportion of mankind. Children, by their heedlessness, often expose themselves to danger, and their very amusements are so often destructive, that we frequently wonder that so many live to years of maturity. Bless God that *you* were spared.

Let us next refer to "the slippery paths of YOUTH," as they are most justly called. The seeds of sin which are in our fallen nature now shoot up, and quickly produce the hateful fruits of vice—"the youthful lusts which war against the soul." Violent are the propensities of our sinful nature, which too often break through every fence of good education, conscience, prudence, character and health; which tend to the ruin both of body and soul, and lay the foundation for bitter repentance, or eternal punishment. If the reader has been, in any happy degree,

preserved from these grosser vices, let him not forget the great benefit; or, if reclaimed from sinful practices, let him ascribe it to the riches of divine grace, "Not unto me, O Lord," let him say, "but to thy name be all the glory."

Proceed to review the years of MIDDLE LIFE. God's providence directed thy path into those connections and employments from which thy support has been derived. "In the sweat of thy brow," it may be, "thou hast eaten bread;" but who gave thee strength to labor, industry in thy calling, success in thy business? And if He hath given thee wealth, take care to ascribe it to the bounty of thy heavenly Father, and "burn not incense to thy own net," boast not of thy own wisdom and diligence, for they are the gifts of God. Or, if less prosperity has been thy portion, and poverty has been thy painful lot, still thou hast had food and raiment; and perhaps better health, and more contentment, than many of thy superiors; and even thy hard labor and scanty fare may have been thy greatest blessings, by becoming the means of preserving thee from the snares of prosperity, and the love of the world, which have proved the ruin of some of thy richer neighbors.

In the course of a long life, it is probable that you may have cause to look back on some remarkable deliverances from danger. If you have been to sea, it is likely that you have weathered many a hard gale, or narrowly escaped a fatal shipwreck; your companions, it may be, perished in the mighty waters,

but your life was given you for a prey. O that seamen, thus preserved, "would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." But there are also many dangers on land as well as at sea. Workmen, in some employments, are exposed to great danger or diseases; and travellers to many sad disasters. Preservation from these is a special benefit, to be thankfully recorded and acknowledged.

Few have lived long in the world who have not, at times, been dangerously ILL. There was a time, perhaps, when some alarming disease had so far prevailed that little or no hope of life could be indulged; when, apparently, there was but a step between thee and death. But God spake the word; he rebuked the disease, and health was once more restored. Did you render to the Lord according to the benefit received? Did you remember the vows you made in sickness, when you resolved, that if God would spare your life you would mind religion more, and serve the Lord better than you did before? Let conscience answer. The Psalmist, whose words compose our text, adds, almost immediately after them, "Who healeth all thy diseases;" making recovery from sickness one of the special benefits which ought not to be forgotten.

Let DOMESTIC COMFORTS also be thankfully remembered. It is God who makes the solitary to dwell in families. Our Maker thought it not good for man to be alone; and, by the institution of marriage, laid the foundation of a thousand comforts,

and the numberless charities of social life. The reader has probably sustained the relation of a husband, or wife, or parent, or brother, or sister; and from these tender relations has received, for many a year, a rich variety and a succession of his chief delights; they have been the source of his principal happiness through life. Let not these be all buried in oblivion. Some of those dear relatives are gone to the grave, but you have not forgotten their kindness; O forget not to praise that God from whom all their kindness flowed.

But there are greater benefits by far than those which have been mentioned—RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES and SPIRITUAL BENEFITS; privileges which, if rightly improved, and benefits which, if truly experienced, extend to the eternal world, and will give occasion for everlasting praises.

What a privilege is it to have been born in this Christian and Protestant country; in this land of Gospel light and religious liberty! Let the aged, as well as the juvenile Christian, say,

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

Here we have the Bible, the Word of God, in our own language; that holy book, which, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit who inspired it, is able to

make us "wise to salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Here we are not forbidden to read it, as the people were in former days, and some are still; but have every encouragement to search the Scriptures for ourselves, and to make them the test of all religious opinions.

Here, also, we enjoy the rich privilege of hearing the Gospel. God has favored our country with many able and faithful ministers of the truth, who plainly and fully declare the whole counsel of God. "Blessed are our eyes, for they see, and our ears, for they hear!" Thrice blessed are we if the eyes of our understanding have been enlightened to discern the Savior; and, feeling our need of him, to flee to him for refuge, to receive him as our Prophet to teach us, our Priest who atoned for us, our King to rule over us. Blessed, indeed, are they who "know Christ; win Christ; are found in Christ;" who hope and trust in Christ, to whom "he is become precious," yea, "all in all."

Some may also look back to early life, and have reason to bless God that they are descended from pious parents, and have enjoyed the benefit of a religious education; and that they had the advantage of a father's or of a mother's instruction and example; if, indeed, that instruction was received, and that example followed. If not, if notwithstanding such advantages, the way of sin and folly was preferred and persisted in, those abused privileges will rise up in judgment to condemn the aged transgressor; and those dear and valuable parents will be

obliged to become witnesses against their children. But, God forbid! May the parents meet their posterity in glory, and say, to the praise of divine grace, "Here are we, and the children which thou gavest us." What a happy meeting will that be!

And now, having called to mind some of the many mercies and blessings received, let the reader adopt the words of the holy Psalmist, and say, "*What shall I render unto the* LORD *for all his benefits toward me?*" Psalm 116:12.

This is the inquiry of a grateful soul, "loaded," as the Scripture expresses it, "with his benefits;" overwhelmed, as it were, with a sense of their multitude and magnitude, and of his own utter unworthiness. Thus the patriarch Jacob, when returning to his own country after an absence of many years, reviewing the dealings of God with him, says, "O God of my fathers, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, or, (as it is in the margin,) *I am less than the least* of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands!" Jacob was a good man, and, by his wealth, a great man; but he was also a humble man, and owns, as every sinner ought, that he was totally unworthy of all, of any, of the numerous mercies he had received since the time he fled from his father's house to avoid the rage of his brother Esau; he was then like a forlorn pilgrim; he had no guide, no companion, no servant, no possessions; nothing but

his walking-staff to lean upon when weary; and now, notwithstanding he had passed through many severe trials in the service of Laban, he had a numerous family, and very great possessions of flocks, and herds, and camels. He admires the bounty of God to himself, an undeserving sinner.

Such were also the feelings of David when raised to the throne of Israel; and thus he expressed them, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? and what can David say more unto thee?" David was a very eminent man, a man of great gifts, great valor, great success, "the darling of his country and the dread of his enemies;" but he thought meanly of himself, and ascribed all his prosperity and elevation to the goodness of God, whose undeserved favors had no parallel in the dealings of men. Now, if such was the language of that great and good man, Oh with what deep humility should our gratitude be mingled!

We should abound in the praises of God; we should "abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness. It is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely." And though our poor praises are not worthy of his acceptance, yet he is pleased to say, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." But let us put our praises into the hands of Jesus, our great High Priest, that they may be presented with the fragrant incense of his powerful intercession. "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."

But more is requisite than the fruit of the lips. Let us praise him, "not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days." Thus St. Paul, after treating at large on those great blessings of salvation—justification by the blood of Christ, sanctification by the Spirit of Christ, and the future glory of believers—urges, from a sense of obligation, the great duty of devotedness to God: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." And say, Reader, is not this *your* reasonable service? Did you not too long yield the members of your body as instruments of sin? Now, then, yield yourself unto God, as one who is alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. The years that are past may suffice, and more than suffice, to have "wrought the will of the Gentiles;" and now apply to yourself this question, "What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." But if, through grace, you are no longer the servant of sin, but the servant of God, let your fruit be unto holiness, and the end shall be everlasting life. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Thanks be unto God for Jesus Christ, his unspeakable gift."

PRAYER.

O GOD, thou art good, and doest good, and thy tender mercies are over all thy works. Thou art the great Preserver of men, who givest us all things richly to enjoy. Oh! how many and how great have been thy favors bestowed upon me. When I review the years that are past, I may truly say, Goodness and mercy have followed me all my days; in helpless infancy, in thoughtless childhood, and in giddy youth. From thy undeserved goodness I received strength for labor; my food and my raiment; my preservation from danger, and recovery from sickness. From thee, the source of every comfort, I derived all my relative and domestic blessings; and, above all, I thank and praise thee "for the means of grace and the hopes of glory." Thanks be to thee for the precious Bible, and for the glad tidings of the gospel, and for the grace of thy Holy Spirit. O that a due sense of all thy mercies may rest upon my heart, and constrain me to depart from all iniquity, and to do those things which are pleasing in thy sight. And O that it may be my happiness to join the redeemed throng in the heavenly world, and to unite with them in the praises of God and the Lamb for evermore. Amen.

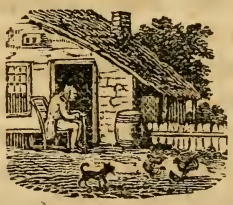
HYMN.

When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.

Thy providence my life sustain'd,
And all my wants redrest,
When in the silent womb I lay,
And hung upon the breast.

When in the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm, unseen, convey'd me safe,
And led me up to man.

Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll pursue;
And after death, in distant worlds,
The glorious theme renew.



PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

THE CONVERSION OF MANASSEH.

And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and 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 the Lord he was God.—2 Chron. 33: 12, 13.

THE conversion of an aged sinner is a useful subject for an aged reader, whether he be in a converted or in an unconverted state. If he is a converted person, he will ascribe the change of his own heart to the same free and powerful grace of God which changed the heart of king Manasseh; and if he is yet unconverted, he may learn the necessity of such a change, and be led to "humble himself greatly" before an offended God, not without hope of being accepted and pardoned through Jesus Christ.

The history of the Jewish nation is like a faithful mirror in which human nature is clearly shown, both in its best and in its worst forms. Here we behold the depravity and rebellion of man in its most horrible degree, as in the case of Manasseh,

before us. Here, too, we behold, with astonishment, the extent of divine mercy, and the power of divine grace; we learn not only that "there is forgiveness with God," but that "where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded." In no case, perhaps, has this great truth been more fully exemplified than in that of Manasseh.

That we may obtain the instruction which this passage suggests, let us first take a view of Manasseh's criminal conduct; and, secondly, make some remarks on his repentance, and on the mercy he obtained.

1. Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah, one of the best and most pious kings that ever reigned. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done." He succeeded wicked Ahaz, who had abolished the worship of Jehovah, and established abominable idolatries; but Hezekiah began his glorious reign by restoring the house and service of God, and reclaiming the nation from their impiety. "He wrought that which was good, and right, and truth, before the Lord his God; and in every work that he begun in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered."

What might not have been expected from a son brought up under such a father? for no doubt he was well instructed by precept, as well as by example. But, O what a change took place when

Manasseh ascended the throne! He began to reign when only twelve years of age; and, probably, fell into the hands of some of his wicked grandfather's counsellors, who advised him to set aside the holy religion of Jehovah, and to substitute the base and obscene worship of the idolatrous heathen. All that Hezekiah had done was speedily overthrown; the worship of Jehovah was suppressed, and the worship of Baal, and of the heavenly bodies, was set up in its stead; and for this purpose he built altars in the court of the Lord's house; he placed an idolatrous image in the temple itself, and performed religious rites, accompanied with abominable practices, like those of the Canaanites, whom God had destroyed because of their detestable wickedness. He was so infatuated by his paganish religion as to cause his own children to pass through the fire in honor of his idols. Instead of having recourse for advice to the prophets and priests of Jehovah, "he used enchantments and witchcraft, and dealt with familiar spirits." Witches and wizards having, or pretending to have, supernatural powers, certainly existed in ancient times; though now, amidst the light and power of Christ by the gospel, we know nothing of them.

Not content with the practice of idolatry by himself or his family, he prohibited the true religion; and with diabolical cruelty persecuted those (and we suppose there were many) who still adhered to it. There must have been thousands of the pious worshippers of God in the twenty-nine years of

Hezekiah's reign. The number of sufferers, therefore, must have been very great. We read in 2 Kings, 21: 16, that "he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." Multitudes of infants were probably sacrificed to Moloch; his government, it is likely, was arbitrary and cruel, and the number of martyrs to the cause of God very great. This was a dreadful aggravation of his monstrous guilt; for he not only sinned exceedingly himself, but "he made Judah to sin; he seduced the people to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel."

All this he did in spite of the warnings and remonstrances of the prophets and seers, who spake to him in the name of the Lord, and who had the courage to deliver this terrible message, "Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it both his ears shall tingle; and I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down; and I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance; and I will deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil unto all their enemies."

We may conclude, from this dreadful threatening, that God was greatly displeased; we may judge of the enormity of the guilt contracted, by the terrors of the punishment threatened, which was actually

inflicted when Nebuchadnezzar burnt Jerusalem, and carried Judah into captivity. But long before this general ruin took place the land was invaded by the "captains of the host of the king of Assyria." The particulars of this invasion, and of the resistance made by Manasseh, are not recorded; but we are informed that he fled for his life, was taken prisoner among the thorns, or in some secret covert of a wood or garden, where he had concealed himself; that he was loaded with chains and carried to Babylon, where it is probable that he was confined in a dungeon and suffered severe affliction.

And now what might be expected but that he would become "a terror to himself;" and that by some uncommon tortures, proportioned in some degree to the unparalleled enormity of his crimes, and the guilt of his numberless murders, he would finish his bloody course on the scaffold, abhorred by God and detested by man, and then be banished to the world of punishment, "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

But, stop! Hear the word of the Lord. "My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah, 55:8, 9.

Had we read in the Bible only of the sins of Manasseh, as recorded in the second book of Kings, (chap. 21,) and not the account of his repentance in the book of Chronicles, (chap. 33,) we should have

concluded that he had "died in his sins;" that, like Judas, "he had gone to his own place;" and that his torments would have exceeded those of any miserable sufferer there. But God's thoughts and proceedings are not to be regulated by ours. God, the holy and the just, infinite in mercy, thought proper to make Manasseh a trophy of his grace, and thus to hold forth to all the world a prop against despair, and to show the most guilty of mankind that "there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared."

II. Let us now, therefore, proceed to the second part of our discourse, which is to make some remarks on the repentance of Manasseh, and the mercy he obtained.

Let us first notice his affliction. "The Lord brought upon him the army of the Assyrians;" so it is expressed. Was it not the pride and ambition of the enemy that brought them? It was. But still "it was the Lord." War is his scourge by which he punishes wicked princes and wicked nations. Sin is the procuring cause of national calamities; it was evidently so in this case. The enemy prevailed, and Manasseh fled for his life; glad to exchange his rooms of state for the covert of thick trees or thorny hedges. But his eager pursuers found out his retreat; seized his person, loaded him with chains, and carried him away, four hundred miles or more, to the capital of the conqueror.

In the solitary dungeon Manasseh had time for reflection. In the day of adversity he began to *con-*

sider. A great revolution in his affairs had taken place. He had lost his throne; was driven from his country; was separated from his family, his courtiers, his friends; was shut up in a prison, and had probably no hope of restoration, or even of life. In this sad solitude he begins to reflect on his past conduct. The piety, the zeal, the counsels, the example of his good father would recur to his memory; his own folly in forsaking the God of his fathers; his impious zeal to destroy the true religion; his establishment of a base idolatry; his own vices and those of his people; his cruel and bloody persecution of the faithful; all these would rush into his mind, and he might reasonably conclude that his present sufferings were the just punishment of his multiplied and aggravated offences, and the prelude of everlasting pains.

These painful reflections had a good issue. He did not sink into despair, nor venture to blaspheme his Maker. He had not recourse, as too many have in trouble, to intemperance, trying to drown their cares and sorrows in strong drink; but, like the prodigal son in the parable, when reduced to extreme poverty, "he came to himself;" and then resolved to return to his father; so Manasseh "humbled himself *greatly* before Jehovah, the God of his fathers." Oh, who can tell what tortures of conscience, what pangs of grief, what fears of wrath, what agonizing remorse he endured when he looked back on, perhaps, forty years of his own apostacy and rebellion against God, on his having led thousands into sin

and perdition; and on his "blood guiltiness" in the persecution of a multitude of God's children.

Penitence led him to prayer. This is the best refuge of the guilty sinner. "Is any man afflicted? let him pray. Call upon me in the day of trouble," saith God himself, who heareth prayer, "and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Doubtless his prayer was for mercy; perhaps in the words of David, his ancestor, as in Psalm 51:1. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." His praying is particularly noticed, though we have not the words of his prayer. We have, indeed, in the Apocrypha, a prayer ascribed to him, on which, however, we can place no dependance; yet the following sentences were suitable to his condition. "I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea. My transgressions, O Lord, are multiplied. I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot lift up my head, for I have provoked thy wrath. Thine angry threatenings toward sinners are insupportable, but thy merciful promise is unmeasurable and unsearchable; for thou art the most high Lord, of great compassion, long-suffering, very merciful, and according to thy great goodness, hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against thee; I humbly beseech thee, forgive me O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities."

It was the misfortune of Manasseh to be deprived of his pious father when he was only twelve years

of age: yet, we may suppose that he had not entirely forgotten the instructions of his godly parent. Probably he had some of the psalms in his memory; he had gone with his father to the temple of God, and had observed the ordinances of religion. He had witnessed the solemn service on the day of atonement, the sacrifice for the nation's sins, and he had heard the blessing pronounced by the high priest after he had presented the blood in the holy of holies. The design of all this it is likely that Hezekiah or the priests had explained to him, so that he knew the way of salvation, as far as it could then be known; and though he had neglected and despised it all, yet now that he was in trouble, and afraid of the wrath of God, he was prepared to seek his face and favor with his whole heart.

Happy was the result. "God was entreated of him," and "all the sins and trespasses he had committed before he was humbled" were forgiven. Marvellous mercy! most astonishing grace! Well may we exclaim, "Who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin!"

The sincerity of Manasseh's repentance was proved by "works meet for repentance;" for when God, in his great goodness, and by his wonderful providence, restored him to his country and his throne, he immediately abolished idolatry, destroyed the altars of idols, and repaired the altar of Jehovah, sacrificed peace-offerings and thank-offerings thereon, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. And thus he proved that

"he knew that the LORD (Jehovah) was God:" he was convinced that the idols he had worshipped were vanity and lies, and that Jehovah is the only living and true God, alone worthy to be adored, beloved, and obeyed.

1. *Young people* should learn important lessons from the history of Manasseh. Like him, you, perhaps, have had a religious education. You were trained up in the way you should go; take care not to depart from it; shun the company of the ungodly, who would tempt you to forsake it; and do not presume that, if you sin like Manasseh, you shall, like him, be restored. Amon, the son of Manasseh, was a wicked and idolatrous prince, and notwithstanding he knew what his father suffered for his sin, and how God had restored him when he repented, yet "he humbled not himself as his father had done, but trespassed more and more."

2. We may learn not to despair of the recovery of the greatest sinners. Had we witnessed the enormous wickedness of Manasseh, we should have given him up for lost. Thus many serious persons are ready to despair of the conversion of those who sin with a high hand. But "is any thing too hard for the Lord?" No: "he is mighty to save; able to save to the uttermost."

3. But let none dare to persist in sin, presuming that they may repent and reform when they please. We have very few instances of the conversion of notorious offenders, like Manasseh. A few there

are, that none may despair; and but few, that none may presume.

4. The recovery of Manasseh, when in deep affliction, may serve to reconcile us to afflictions. What reason had he to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, for before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." Had he retained his palace in Jerusalem, or been luxuriously entertained in the palace at Babylon, we might never have heard of his conversion; but trouble, and solitude, and reflection, were the means which were blessed to bring him to God.

5. Above all, let us learn to admire and adore the riches of divine grace. Here was grace indeed! True grace! Abounding grace! Here, indeed, did grace reign in glorious sovereignty, and Manasseh might have said, as Saul, the converted persecutor, said, "I obtained mercy,"—and "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant"—"and for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

We conclude with St. Paul's doxology, "Now, unto the King eternal, immorta, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, and most merciful Father, thou art infinitely pure and holy, and hatest iniquity with a perfect hatred. Thine anger against sin has been awfully manifested in our world ever since the fall of Adam, by whose disobedience sin entered into the world, and death, with all its attendant miseries. Thou hast also declared that the wicked shall be turned into hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Nevertheless, it hath pleased thee to proclaim thine own name, "as the Lord God, merciful and gracious, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;" and thou hast "so loved the world as to give thine only begotten Son to be a sacrifice for sin, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Thanks be to thee, O God of all grace, for this provision of mercy, and these promises of pardon through the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thou hast also encouraged great sinners to apply for mercy, by the examples of Manasseh and Paul. O God, I need mercy as much as they did. O glorify the same mercy in the pardon of all my sins, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Lord and the Redeemer. Amen.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

THE DUTIES OF THE AGED.

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.—Titus, 2:2.

THE two principal designs of the Scriptures are, to teach us what we are to believe concerning God, and what duties he requires of us; or, in other words, to direct both our faith and our practice. Thus, St. Paul says in the 11th and 12th verses of this chapter, that "the grace of God," or the Gospel, "which bringeth salvation;" that is, which reveals it for "the obedience of faith," teacheth us that, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Doctrinal and practical preaching must go together, for so the apostle directed Titus to preach, (verse 1,) "Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." He was first to preach "sound doctrine;" the great leading truths of the Gospel, relating to grace and salvation; and then, the duties of Christians; of aged men, aged women, young men, young women, and servants. Practical preaching well accords with Evangelical preaching. They

are not contrary to one another, as some seem to think, but are closely united, as the same apostle speaks, (chapter 3, verse 8,) "This is a faithful saying; and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works;" and this kind of preaching he recommends by saying, "These things are good and profitable to men." And he first points out the duty of *aged men.* None are too old to learn. Aged people should not be self-conceited, as too many are, and think they need no instruction; but be glad to learn what are the special duties which God requires of them. St. Paul mentions them in the six following particulars.

1. *Sobriety,* or *watchfulness;* 2. *Gravity* in their behavior; 3. *Temperance* in their diet and other indulgences; 4. *Soundness in their faith;* 5. *Charitableness* of temper and practice; and 6. *Patience* under their trials and infirmities.

1. In the first place SOBRIETY is required; this signifies sobriety of mind, rather than of appetite; for *temperance* is, afterward, separately mentioned. The aged Christian should be sober-minded; habitually sedate and vigilant. Our Savior strongly inculcated watchfulness on ALL his disciples; but it is peculiarly necessary for the aged. The decays of nature, the failure of strength, and the various pains and infirmities of advanced life, loudly proclaim the approach of death, which cannot be far distant, and may be near at hand, even at the door. Many old

people die suddenly. A fit of the palsy or apoplexy seizes the human frame, and in a few days, sometimes in a few hours or in a few moments, life is extinct. How often have we read or heard of aged people thus suddenly taken ill at the dinner-table, or sitting in their chair, or lying in their bed; they have been deprived of their reasoning powers in a moment, soon dismissed from the body, and removed to the invisible and eternal world! The uncertainty of the time when God shall call us hence was urged by our Lord as an argument to enforce his exhortation to watchfulnes: "Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

The aged should be careful to improve all opportunities for spiritual improvement: all the means of grace in their power; for probably many, very many, have been sinfully neglected; and few, very few, may yet remain. Aged people should be watchful against those evils to which age is most prone, especially *covetousness*, and *love of the world*. They should also guard against pride and peevishness, and needless or excessive anger; and, above all, they should "watch unto prayer." Never was it more necessary. Let them now double their former diligence, frequency, and fervency, in addressing the throne of grace.

2. GRAVITY, or SERIOUSNESS, is requisite in the character of the aged. Levity, or excessive gayety of temper and talk, is censurable in all; but it is far more blameable in the old than in the young. 'Fil-

thiness, foolish talking and jesting, are never convenient," but in aged people they are intolerably odious and detestable. When a great minister of state, in former times, was observed by some of his friends at court to be more fond of retirement, and more pensive than formerly, they rallied him upon it, fearing he was becoming melancholy: but that great man answered them thus—"Ah! my friends, while we laugh, all things about us are serious. God is serious, who exerciseth patience toward us; Christ is serious, who shed his blood for us; the Holy Ghost is serious, who striveth against the obstinacy of our hearts; all that are in heaven, and all that are in hell, are serious. How then can a man that hath one foot in the grave jest and laugh?"

Cheerfulness, indeed, is very desirable and amiable in the aged. True religion, and a lively hope of heavenly happiness, may well inspire the good man with cheerfulness; it helps him the better to bear his infirmities, and it renders him far more pleasing to his family and young friends; but cheerfulness must not degenerate into folly and lightness; nor should the aged of either sex be gay in their apparel, or frequent places of public amusement; but retirement, reading the Scriptures, attending the house of God, (if able,) abounding in private prayer, and recommending religion by their conversation and example to their children and grand-children, and to all about them; these are the means whereby the aged may become happy in themselves, and respected by others.

3. The next duty enjoined by the apostle, is

TEMPERANCE. By temperance is meant a moderate use of the gifts of Providence, especially in eating and drinking. God has so formed our mortal bodies, that they must be daily recruited by meat and drink. He has mercifully provided proper articles of nutriment. At first, the fruit of the trees was the food of man; then God granted a variety of herbs; and, lastly, the flesh of beasts, birds, and fishes. He has given man the free use of all these; he has also endowed him with appetite, that he may seek his food and enjoy it. But through the depravity of his fallen nature, he is prone to abuse these gifts of God by gluttony and drunkenness. He is become carnal; he "minds earthly things;" he is the *natural*, or *animal* man; he lives a life of mere sense, like the brutes that perish; and his inquiries are, like those of the heathen, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithall shall we be clothed?" In the mean while God is forgotten; religion is disregarded, perhaps despised; and the salvation of the immortal soul totally neglected.

This disposition and conduct is dangerous at any period of life; but it is dreadful, indeed, when life is drawing to a close. Then men should be more dead to the world and its pleasures; but if then they are intemperate, their case is truly awful. Perhaps they may plead that their strength fails, that their spirits sink, and that they need greater support than formerly: and, doubtless, it is lawful to pay a proper attention to food and drink, and to receive with thankfulness the needful supports of nature; but

moderation is absolutely necessary, even for this purpose; and the recourse that too many aged men, and it is grievous to add, *women* also, have to the use of *spirituous liquors*, can never be sufficiently lamented. It is perfectly shocking to see the numbers of persons, of both sexes, continually going in and coming out of liquor-shops; and multitudes are dropping into eternity, in consequence of that fatal practice, which grew upon them by insensible degrees. O beware of this poison, and abstain from that intemperance to which the aged are often tempted, and which proves the ruin both of body and soul.

How often has it happened that death has ensued soon after going to a feast, or gratifying the palate with too great a variety or quantity of meats and drinks. Observe, then, the caution of our great Lord, "Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and that day come upon you unawares." Let the aged men, then, be always temperate; let them be very moderate in the indulgence of appetite, for excess is assuredly highly prejudicial to old age, hurtful to health, and dangerous to the soul.

4. St. Paul, in the next place, exhorts to SOUNDNESS IN THE FAITH. It may seem peculiar that this direction should be mingled with moral precepts—that being "sound in the faith," should be joined with sobriety, gravity, and temperance. Perhaps the reason may be this:—the duties recommended will not be performed by the mere exertions and

efforts of the natural man: "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and whilst men remain "in the flesh they cannot please God," or bring forth "the fruits of the Spirit." We must be born again; born of the Spirit, and then we "shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." Until we become sound in the faith;—until we believe in Christ for the salvation of the soul;—until we are united to him by faith, as the branch is to the vine, we cannot bring forth the fruits of holiness; but if we "abide in him, and his words of truth abide in us, we shall not be barren or unfruitful," even in old age; but learn from Christ that soberness, that seriousness, that moderation in all worldly enjoyments, which will prove that we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Aged men, therefore, must be steadfast in their belief, and in their profession of the faith; and not be turned aside to novelties and fancies, nor be turned back by persecution, should it arise, but contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and transmit the same, unadulterated, to the next generation.

5. CHARITY is another grace which well becomes the aged believer. We understand by it, not merely alms-giving, though that is one excellent and useful branch of charity; but it signifies *christian love.* Love to God, the God of love; and love to all the family of man, but especially to the household of faith. This grace of the Holy Spirit, imparted to all real Christians, is the greatest of all. St. Paul, giving us the essentials of true religion, says, "Now

abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." God, the great, the holy, and the just, who might justly have punished sinners with everlasting destruction, has, out of his own infinite goodness and mercy, devised means for their salvation; has given his dear and only begotten Son to be a Savior—a Savior of sinners, by dying for sinners, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." He has declared himself to be reconciled to sinners hereby; and he sends his messengers to beseech us to be reconciled to him, promising to receive and pardon, and bless for ever, all who come to him by Jesus Christ. Oh how amiable does God in Christ appear! How worthy to be loved and adored! And how ready should we be to prove our love to him. And as we cannot confer any benefit upon the glorious God himself—as "our goodness cannot extend to him," let it be directed to "the saints, the excellent of the earth;" whom he has appointed his representatives here below; for the love and kindness we show to them, he puts to his own account; and in the judgment of the great day he will say to all who exercise this christian grace toward the members of his church, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

6. PATIENCE is, in the last place, enforced upon the aged; and it is well known that the numerous pains and troubles of the aged call for the exercise

of this grace. Corrupt nature is apt to fret and murmur when afflictions are heavy, and numerous, and long-continued; but a Christian will resist temptations to impatience, by recollecting the numberless mercies he has enjoyed in youth and middle life; by reflecting on his own sinful conduct toward God; and above all, by considering the gracious design of his heavenly Father in these corrections. They are the tokens of paternal love, intended to purge away the dross of corruption; to wean the heart from the creature, and to direct the affections to things above, toward which the aged Christian is advancing every day. If, then, he believes that "all things work together for good to those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose," he will be reconciled to the rod, and bless the hand that chastises.

Immediately after the text the apostle directs Titus how to instruct the *aged women*. He was to exhort them to such a "behavior as becometh holiness." Their temper and conduct should accord with their profession of the holy Gospel. They must "not be false accusers," they must not be slanderers, or backbiters, sowing discord by tattling and speaking evil, which is too common a fault; and one which some aged persons are very apt to commit. They must "not be given to much wine," or strong drink; to this vice some may be tempted by the lowness of their spirits, and growing weakness; but such a remedy is worse than the disease; it is criminal in all, but shocking and shameful in aged women. On the

contrary, they are "to teach," as well as practise, "good things;" not to teach publicly, that is forbidden, (1 Cor. 14:34,) but they should instruct the young women in their proper duties, (verses 4, 5.) No persons are such proper teachers of the younger females, as wise and virtuous matrons, who may be very useful in that department, and they should diligently attend to it.

CONCLUSION.

The holy apostle has set before us, in this text, a lovely picture of a good old man. Here we see what an aged person *ought to be*, and what some, by the grace of God, actually are. But, reader, how is it with you? Are you sober and watchful, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience? If it be so, God be thanked. Give him the praise; "be sober, and hope to the end."

But what a horrid spectacle do we sometimes behold!—an aged man tottering on the edge of the grave; not sober and watchful, but careless and unconcerned about his soul; not grave and serious, but vain and trifling, light and foolish; not temperate, but fond of indulgence, making his belly his god, and sometimes intoxicated and degraded to a level with the beasts; not sound in the faith, but destitute of the knowledge of the Gospel, and contentedly ignorant of Christ; not abounding in love to God and man, but under the power of a carnal mind, which

is enmity against God; and toward man selfish, covetous, angry, and morose; not patient in affliction, but murmuring at his lot, and unwilling to bear the rod.

Oh unhappy man! to what little purpose hast thou lived so long! What deep repentance becomes thee! "Awake, awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Cry, cry aloud, cry immediately to God. Say, "Save, Lord, or I perish! God be merciful to me a sinner!" And O that he who listened to the cry of the penitent malefactor on the cross, may hear thy prayer, forgive thy sin, renew thy heart, and save thee with an everlasting salvation.

PRAYER.

Blessed God! thou hast said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." The holy temper and conduct which have now been recommended to me, are highly becoming in all who are called Christians, and are peculiarly necessary and beautiful in the aged. O God, give me, I beseech thee, thy Holy Spirit; that being renewed in the spirit of my mind, I may be truly vigilant, serious, temperate, and sound in the faith; full of love to God and man, and patient under all the infirmities and afflictions of age.

If I have hitherto been a stranger to true religion, and have lived until now without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world; O have

mercy upon me, and suffer me not to die in this state, for then I should perish for ever; but hear my cry, O God! and extend thine arm of mercy; pluck me quickly as a brand from the fire; wash me from all my sins in the blood of the Lamb; and by thy almighty grace make me a new creature, prepared for death and heaven.

HYMN.

Are we not sons and heirs of God?
Are we not bought with Jesus' blood?
Do we not hope for heavenly joys?
And shall we stoop to trifling toys?

Doth vain discourse or empty mirth
Well suit the honors of our birth?
Shall we be fond of gay attire,
Which children love, and fools admire?

Can meats, or choicest wines procure
Delights that ever shall endure?
Shall my best powers be thus debas'd,
And part with heaven to please my taste?

Great God, new mould my sensual mind,
And let my joys be more refined;
Raise me to dwell among the blest,
And fit me for thy heavenly feast.

DOUBTS AND FEARS REPROVED.

Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, *and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the* LORD, *the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the* LORD *shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*—Isaiah, 40: 27—31.

IT is probable that these words were originally intended for the encouragement of the captive Jews in Babylon, some of whom might be tempted to distrust the power and promise of God for their restoration; but they are certainly applicable to all weak believers, in every period of life; and particularly to aged christians, who are often feeble in mind as well as in body; who are frequently in a low

frame, and tempted to fear and despondency. These words very fully express the doubts and fears of such persons, and are admirably adapted to check and remove them. May the good spirit of God accompany what shall be offered from this text with his special blessing, for that happy purpose. The words contain three things:—

I. An unworthy suspicion;
II. A kind expostulation; and
III. A gracious promise.

I. Let us first examine the *unworthy suspicion* entertained by the weak believer. "My way is hid from the Lord—my judgment is passed over from my God;—as if he had said—He takes no notice of my sorrowful condition; or, if he sees, he does not regard it, or interpose for my relief. Thus Job, in the agony of his spirit, improperly said, "God hath taken away my judgment," that is, refused to do him justice, or to defend him from the cruel censures of his friends. The Psalmist intimates similar suspicions, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Psalm 77: 7, &c. But he checks himself for such sad apprehensions, and therefore adds, "I said, This is my infirmity." So it was, as we shall presently see. A similar complaint we find in Isaiah, 49: 14, 15: "Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath

forgotten me; and this is immediately reproved by the following words, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" This, indeed, is by no means a common case; yet it is possible, "they *may* forget;" but the Lord *cannot—will not* forget his people; for he says, "I have graven thee on the palms of my hands," alluding to the custom of making artificial and durable marks on the hands, as memorandums of things to be remembered. We find even David, who was usually strong in faith, saying, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul;" though God had given him a sure promise of the throne which Saul then occupied. Yea, Abraham himself, the strongest of all strong believers, seemed to despair of the fulfilment of the promise, when he took Hagar; and when he had recourse also to misrepresentation for the protection of Sarah his wife.

When a Christian is severely afflicted—has a body perhaps grievously diseased—has acute and constant pain—lingering disorders preying on his vitals, destroying appetite, depriving him of sleep; when he can get no relief from medicines or operations, and all things unite to depress his spirits, he may be tempted to think his case very hard and very singular, and to fear that God has forgotten or forsaken him.

Others, it may be, have suffered great losses in trade, by bad debts, or the failure of business, or the death of employers or friends; by fire, by robbery,

by treachery, or other causes; and been thus reduced, as it has often happened, to a state of absolute poverty, dependance, and want. Such a condition is inexpressibly trying, and without divine support, the afflicted man, surrounded, it may be, by a distressed and destitute family, is ready to sink into despair. It is well if he be not tempted to say, "My way is hid from the Lord. My God hath, I fear, forgotten me."

There are many other cases of deep affliction. Much suffering is sometimes occasioned by the unkindness, the idleness, the extravagance, the drunkenness, of a dissolute husband; and the oppressed wife pines away in sorrow and penury. Or children, who ought to be the props of aged parents, are undutiful, ungodly, rebellious, and injurious. Or, the sinking and afflicted man may be a backslider. Once he took pleasure in religion, and perhaps prospered in the world; but a sad reverse has taken place; his backslidings severely reprove him; and conscious of having forsaken God, he is afraid that God has forsaken him for ever.

But it is impossible to describe all the varied forms of human wo. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness," and every reader knows "his own plague, and his own sore." Innumerable are the occasions of lamentation and wo, in this vale of tears, which too often cause even the children of God to go mourning all their days. "But is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?" Blessed be God, there is a remedy, and the Christian has, at the worst of times, cause to say,

Salvation! O the joyful sound,
'Tis pleasure to our ears;
A sovereign balm for every wound,
A cordial for our fears.

And this will appear by considering the two following heads of our discourse.

II. In the next place we observe the kind expostulation contained in our text; which refers the afflicted believer to the greatness, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God.

"Why sayest thou?" Why speakest thou as thou hast done? Observe; it is always proper to inquire into the causes and reasons both of our hopes and our fears. We ought to be able "to give a reason of the *hope* that is in us;" and we ought also to be able to give a reason for our *fears*. The question is asked, Why, Jacob, do you say, "My way is hid from the Lord?" &c. Have you forgotten what you have heard, and known, and acknowledged, that the God whom you worship is infinitely great; JEHOVAH, the eternal, unchangeable, self-existent God; the CREATOR of all worlds, and of the matter of which they were formed? We say to our children, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth;" and may we not say to the old, Remember thy Creator in the days of thy age? And will he not have respect to "the work of his own hands?" Say, then, "Where is my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" in the night of age, in the night of affliction? Thus God

expostulated with Israel of old, (Isaiah, 51 : 12, 13,) "I, even I, am he that comforteth you. Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy MAKER, that stretched out the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth?"

Consider his POWER. Is he not *almighty*? What said God to Abraham, when he called him? "I am the ALMIGHTY GOD, walk before me, and be thou perfect;" and when Sarah, his wife, had expressed her doubt of the promised blessing, how was that doubt repelled? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord? the Father ALMIGHTY, the Maker of heaven and earth." What cannot HE do? "Blessed are all they who trust in him."

Consider also his WISDOM—his *infinite* wisdom. Our text says, "There is no searching of his understanding." All his works display a wisdom, a design, a contrivance that fills us with astonishment; and we are forced to exclaim, "In wisdom hast thou made them all!" And it shines especially in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ. Here, indeed, is "the manifold wisdom of God." Nor is his wisdom less displayed in the dealings of his providence with his people. It may, at times, be obscured. His "way may be (trackless) in the sea, and his path in the great waters." "Clouds and darkness may be round about him," but all his ways are wise and good; and "he knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." When the Israelites were persued by

Pharaoh there seemed to be no way of escape; but God made a path for them through the sea. When Elijah was in apparent danger of starvation, God sent ravens twice a day to feed him. God can never be at a loss to sustain or to deliver his people.

Once more—consider his GOODNESS. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord;" it extends to every creature; but the afflicted are the special objects of it. "He giveth power to the faint," to those who through weakness are ready to faint away, and give up all for lost; his gracious power supports them; and to those "who have no might" of their own, he not only *gives*, but "*increaseth* strength." Our sense of weakness prepares us for receiving help, so that, like St. Paul, we may say, "When we are weak, then are we strong; strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Yes, God is good. "Truly God is good to Israel; the goodness of God endureth continually." And this will appear still more fully when we notice—

III. The gracious promise in our text. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," &c. Here is a *duty* to be performed, and a *blessing* to be received.

"Waiting upon God" includes his worship; and he has pronounced a blessing on spiritual worshippers: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Those who seek the favors of the great, dili-

gently repair to their palaces or mansions; how much more diligent should we be in attending the palace of the Great King, the King of Zion, who daily gives audience to his people, and "waits to be gracious" to all who wait upon him. David, though a king himself, preferred a day in God's courts to a thousand other days; and declared that the chief thing he desired was to "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life." The poor cripple who waited thirty-eight years at the pool of Bethesda, was well rewarded at last, by receiving from Christ immediate strength, so as to take up his bed and walk: believers who wait upon God in the ways of his appointment may expect a greater cure, and strength far more valuable.

Waiting upon the Lord signifies, more particularly, application to him for help, which is to be done by fervent prayer; expectation of that help in answer to prayer; and patient waiting till he shall be pleased to bestow it. Vain is the help of man. Let not the afflicted lift up his eyes to the hills, as the heathen to the temples of their idols erected on the hills, but say, with the Psalmist, "My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." He alone is "the help and the shield" of his people. "Happy, therefore, is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

Waiting implies expectation: he who does not hope will not wait; but "faith accepts God's bond, and patience waits for the payment." God is faithful, who hath promised; and if we judge him so to be, we

shall wait his time for the fulfilment of the promise and plead, as the Psalmist did, "Remember the word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope;" and we may add, as he did, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me." Psalm 119: 49, 50.

The blessing promised is elevation of soul, vigor, and perseverance. "They shall mount with wings as eagles." The eagle is a strong bird, and flies high. So believers arise above earthly things; they feel holy desires and heavenly affections; and being "risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where he is." The spiritual strength which God bestows, enables them to run with alacrity the race which is set before them, without becoming weary of the ways of God, and to walk straight forward, day after day, in the paths of holiness and righteousness, without fainting.

All this they owe to strength communicated from the fulness of Christ. Without him they could do nothing. Without him "the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail:" the most promising professors, left to themselves, and trusting in their own strength, shall become weary of religion, and follow the ways of God no more; but, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, in the inner man, even the aged Christian, whose outward man is much decayed, and who is bowed down with infirmities, shall still press forward, and be kept, by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.

IMPROVEMENT.

This discourse, probably, is not applicable to every reader. The design of it is to remove the doubts and fears of the timid of the flock; but some, perhaps, never had any doubts and fears about their salvation. They have scarcely thought themselves sinners, or, at most, not very great sinners—not worse than others; and that, as God is merciful, they hope to be saved as well as others. It would be happy for such persons if they had doubts and fears; for *they* have great reason to fear, who never saw the evil, nor felt the burden of sin, nor dreaded its consequences; and who, of course, never seriously asked, "What must we do to be saved?"—never prayed in good earnest for pardoning mercy; never fled with fear and trembling to the hope set before them in the gospel. O that such, if such should read or hear this discourse, may be made sensible of their sin and danger, and betake themselves to prayer for the forgiveness of their sins, for an interest in the merits of the Savior, and for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to enable them to enter the ways we have been speaking of, which lead to eternal life.

But the subject is full of encouragement to believers, even to weak believers, to those who struggle with many painful doubts and distressing fears. O see how unworthy are those suspicions you have entertained of the blessed God! Carefully observe how he condescends to expostulate with you on

account of them; and what a gracious promise he gives you of strengthening grace. Why, then, with all this provision of mercy, why are you cast down? "Hope in God, and you shall yet praise him." He bids you wait on him. Wait on him daily in private; and frequently, if you are able, in public. Wait on him diligently, and wait his leisure. "The vision may yet be 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."

PRAYER.

O Thou, who art infinite in goodness, full of compassion, and ready to forgive. Thou art unchangeable, and having loved thine own who are in the world, thou lovest them to the end. I blush and am ashamed of myself; ashamed of having ever entertained one hard thought of thee. I am ashamed of having imagined that my way was hid from thee, or my judgment passed over by thee. Forgive, O Lord, I beseech thee, these unbelieving, these injurious suspicions. And enable me ever to remember that thou, the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, art never faint or weary—that thy power, thy wisdom, thy goodness, are always the same. May I ever look to thee for strength; then shall I go on my way rejoicing; I shall mount up with wings as an eagle; I shall run without weariness; and walk without fainting. So be it, blessed Lord, for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

HYMN.

When darkness long has veil'd my mind,
And smiling day once more appears,
Then, my Redeemer, then I find
The folly of my doubts and fears.

Straight, I upraid my wandering heart,
And blush that I should ever be
Thus prone to act so base a part,
Or harbor one hard thought of thee.

O let me then, at length, be taught
What I am still so slow to learn,
That God is love, and changeth not,
Nor knows the shadow of a turn.

Sweet truth! and easy to repeat!
But when my faith is sharply tried,
I find myself a learner yet,
Unskilful, weak, and apt to slide.

But, O my Lord, one look from thee
Subdues my disobedient will;
Drives doubt and discontent away,
And thy rebellious worm is still.

Thou art as ready to forgive
As I am ready to repine;
Thou, therefore, all the praise receive;
Be shame and self-abhorrence mine.

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities; all is vanity.—Eccles. 1:2.

AUGUSTUS CÆSAR called the attention of his soldiers to what he was about to deliver, by saying, "Young men! hearken to me, an old man, to whom old men hearkened when I was young." The words now read demand attention, not only because they were spoken by an old man, but because they were spoken by a great man; Solomon, king of Jerusalem, a wise man, even the wisest of all men; and, what is more, by an inspired man of God, inspired to preach by this book a sermon on the vanity of the world; a sermon dictated by his own experience, for he had tried in every possible way what the world could do for him, and he solemnly pronounces all to be vanity. After having proved the truth of this assertion, he directs us to that which is not vain, but solid, durable, and of everlasting importance—the fear of God, or true religion; the world he declares to be nothing but vanity, but religion he asserts to be "the whole *duty*," or rather the "*whole* of man,"

the chief concern, the true interest, and the complete happiness of man.

This book was the production of his old age, when he had recovered from that partial apostacy into which he had been betrayed by his idolatrous wives. It is the result of the most serious reflection, and of deep repentance. It deserves the close attention of the young; and is peculiarly fitted for the study of the aged, whose long experience, and careful observation of the world, will fully confirm all that Solomon has advanced.

In discoursing on this text we shall,

I. Explain and confirm Solomon's assertion; and,

II. Point out the practical improvement of it.

I. It will be proper to explain the assertion; and we must observe that it must be understood with some limitation. When Solomon asserts that all is vanity, he means that all worldly pursuits, possessions, and enjoyments, are vain, *if taken apart from God*, and the fear of God, or true religion. He could not mean that all the creatures of God are vanity; for when God made them he pronounced them all to be good. When we behold the sun, and the moon, and the stars; when we see a fine prospect, or observe the beasts, the birds, the fishes, the insects, in their various and beautiful forms; or consider the wonderful provision God has made for the food, raiment, and comfort of man; or reflect upon the numerous blessings of social life, we must admit that there remains, notwithstanding the fall of man,

and the prevalence of sin and evil in the world, much of good, for which man should be thankful, and should glorify his Maker.

Yet is the assertion of Solomon in the text perfectly true. Man has, by the fall, departed from God; he has forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn out for himself cisterns which can hold no water. He has lost all spiritual life; he lives a life of mere sense, an animal life. He seeks his happiness in the creature, forgetting the Creator. His cry is, "Who will show me any good?" and instead of seeking the divine favor, and the light of God's countenance, he says, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, wherewithall shall I be clothed?" How shall I get wealth? By what amusements shall I kill time, procure pleasure, silence conscience, and contrive to "live without God in the world?"

These are the pursuits of the men of the world, whose portion is in this life. But do they succeed? Do they obtain the good they seek, and find satisfaction in their attainments? O no. They are sadly disappointed. But they will try again, try something else. They are again disappointed; and yet they go on, year after year, notwithstanding disappointment after disappointment, till they are tired out; and happy is it if they come at last, by divine teaching, to Solomon's conclusion, All is vanity.

No man ever tried what the world could do for him with so much advantage as Solomon. Born a prince, the favorite of his pious father king David, he had all the advantages of the best education; he

was endowed with mental powers far above most men; he was an ardent student in arts and sciences, and he became the greatest philosopher of his age.

When thus qualified, he sought pleasure in architecture; he built splendid palaces and noble cities; he planted beautiful gardens and extensive orchards; he procured the best singers and musicians; he indulged in the pleasures of the table, and in mirth and jollity; and in these pursuits he met with no hinderance from sickness, or war, or want, for he was immensely rich, so that silver was nothing accounted of in his days; "whatsoever his eyes desired he kept not from them; he withheld not his heart from any joy."

And what of all this? What was the result? Take it in his own words. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and the labor that I had labored to do, and behold!" what? "all was vanity." Was that all? No—he adds, "vexation of spirit."

And now—"What shall the man do that cometh after the king?" Can any man now on earth excel or equal king Solomon in his worldly pursuits? No. All our experiments must be made on a much smaller scale; but, on whatever scale they are made, the result must be the same—All is vanity.

Let us now inquire into the reason of this. If it be true that all is vanity, let us examine why it is so.

There is generally disappointment in the pursuits of the world. There is dissatisfaction in the possession. The best enjoyments are not lasting;—and, what is worst of all, instead of promoting, they

frequently prevent and destroy our best, our true, our eternal interests.

1. The vanity of the world is seen in the disappointment of worldly pursuits. Solomon says, "All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it." It is impossible to describe the innumerable ways in which mankind employ themselves. All are active and busy from morning to night, but the greater part "weary themselves for very vanity." Few, comparatively, attain the object of their wishes. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." The most prudent and promising efforts often fail. The industrious tradesman, the ingenious mechanic, the intelligent merchant, the laborious scholar, the sagacious statesman, the courageous soldier, often fail of success; "they cannot perform their enterprise;" they have risen early, and sat up late, and have eaten the bread of carefulness; "all their days are sorrows, and their travail grief; yea their heart taketh not rest in the night. This also is vanity." Eccl. 2: 23.

2. Worldly objects do not *satisfy* when they are attained. It was never designed by our Creator that they should. Their design was to lead men to God; not to be made idols to supplant himself. They are not calculated to feed and fill the immortal mind; therefore they always fail. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." The same may be said of all the

senses, and their gratifications. Hence the perpetual love of change, always hoping that something new will prove more satisfactory. Nothing at present enjoyed is sufficient; wishes grow upon wishes; something more, something better, is still wanted.

> That cruel something, unpossessed,
> Corrodes and poisons all the rest.

So we read in Esther, that Haman, the favorite and prime minister of the king of Persia, loaded with riches and honors, could not be happy because Mordecai, a Jew, refused to give him the homage that other courtiers paid. He called together his family and friends, and with exultation told them how highly the king had promoted and distinguished him; but added, "All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." This one "dead fly in the pot of precious ointment" spoiled it all. His proud heart was full of indignation and revenge, so that he could take no pleasure in all his dignity. It availed him nothing.

In like manner, Ahab, the king of Israel, was dissatisfied with all his worldly possessions, merely because Naboth, his subject and neighbor, refused to sell him his vineyard, which the king coveted for a kitchen garden. The refusal mortified his pride, and spoiled all his comforts; "he came to his palace heavy and displeased—laid himself down on his bed—turned away his face, his spirit was sad—

and he ate no bread." 1 Kings, 21: 1, &c. Ahab had as much of the world as a man could well desire; the land that flowed with milk and honey was at his command; he had all the pleasures of a court, and all the honors of a throne; yet, "all this availed him nothing;" he must have Naboth's vineyard, or he could enjoy nothing. All he possessed was vanity and vexation of spirit.

3. The world cannot satisfy even at the best of times; but how does its extreme vanity appear in its utter insufficiency to support and comfort us at the worst of times. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath;" the world can afford no relief to a conscience oppressed by guilt. A convinced sinner, dreading the just anger of a holy God, can derive no consolation from worldly pleasures; they forsake him in the time of need; and if he knows not Christ, the "brother born for adversity," he is miserable indeed. In the awful hour of death, especially, when heart and flesh are failing, and the soul is about to launch into eternity, and appear before God, all the gold and silver in the universe, all the splendor of an imperial court, all the diadems that princes wear, would not afford one gleam of hope, one ray of comfort. No.—Death writes vanity on all the globe.

Nor can the world, at any time, promote the great interest of man—immortal man. Inordinate pursuits, and immoderate pleasures hinder, instead of helping him in his grand concern. "One thing is

needful," said our great Redeemer; that *one thing* is, doubtless, the care of the soul; but worldly cares and worldly pleasures utterly exclude this care. "They that will be rich," who are resolved, at all events, and by any means, to rise in the world, "fall into a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

The vanities of the world are "lying vanities;" they beguile and deceive by false appearances. Solomon assures us that "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Wicked men are not so happy as they sometimes seem to be; a remarkable instance of this is recorded in the life of Colonel Gardiner, who, in his youth, was devoted to criminal pleasures. When some of his dissolute companions were complimenting him on his felicity, a dog happened to come into the room, when he could not help groaning inwardly, and saying to himself, "O that I were that dog!" and no doubt many sinners feel as completely wretched, even in the moments of their greatest gaiety.

4. But that which most of all proves the utter vanity of worldly things—is that they must all be given up at death. Sometimes they forsake their possessors. Sometimes riches and their attendant pleasures make themselves wings and fly away and leave the man of wealth and pleasure to a destitute and miserable old age. But if they do not leave the man of the world, he must soon leave them. "We brought nothing into the world, and it is cer-

tain we can carry nothing out." He who heaped up riches, "whose inward thought was that his house should continue for ever, and his mansion to all generations; when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." Solomon lays much stress upon this. He makes the worldling say, (Eccl. 2:18,) "I hated all my labor, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool. This also is vanity, and a great evil." Thus our Lord reproves the rich man in the parable, who looked forward to future years of ease and enjoyment, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" and then he adds, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God;" and this naturally leads us, in the

Second place, To point out the practical improvement of this great truth, that *all is vanity*. We have sufficiently proved it; we have seen disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, insufficiency to help in the time of need, and the total loss of all by death; and, perhaps, there is not a reader who will not join issue with Solomon, and say, "It is very true, all is vanity." Indeed, there is no maxim in the Bible more generally admitted than this; but, must we not add, there is no maxim less regarded in practice. Who acts upon this principle? We answer, only those whose hearts are renewed by

the Spirit of God, and possessed of the faith which "overcomes the world." Assuredly, that great inward change, which is called regeneration, must take place ere the disposition of the mind and its constant pursuits can be so altered that spiritual and heavenly objects are habitually preferred to those of time and sense; for "they who are after the flesh," or who remain in their natural and carnal state, "mind the things of the flesh; but they who are after the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit;" and let the next words be solemnly regarded, "for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Rom. 8:5, 6. We say, then, to the reader, what our Lord said to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." John, 3:7.

The prevailing love of the world is inconsistent with the love of God; if we love the world supremely, St. John declares that the love of God is not in us. The faith that worketh by love will direct our regard to Christ and his great salvation; we shall turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and look not chiefly at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal. And if, according to our profession of the Gospel, we are "risen with Christ," we shall "set our affections on things that are above, and not on things that are on earth."

We are permitted to "use the world," but forbidden "to abuse it." The necessaries and the comforts of life may lawfully be enjoyed if kept in their

proper place; if used with moderation, received with thankfulness, and in subordination to the service and glory of God; but not as our portion or chief good.

This subject should teach us to be contented with our lot in the world, and should keep us from envying the rich, and great, and gay, whose prosperity is so dangerous to their souls. Those who have abundance of this world's goods are exposed to greater temptations than the poor, and are in greater danger of being deceived and ruined by the love of vanity.

Finally, let the aged, especially, profit by this subject. Surely their observation and experience confirm the truth of the text; they have lived long enough to see that all is vanity. Their relations, the companions of their youth, the relish they once had for pleasure, and, perhaps, their property too, are all gone. Let them then renounce the world, and seek the support of their declining years in earnest prayer, in serious meditation, in the promises of God, and in the hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and of earth; when thou hadst finished the works of thine hands thou didst pronounce them all to be very good; but by the entrance of sin, all the creatures became subject to vanity. Thy sinful creatures have forsaken thee, the fountain of living waters, and

have hewn out to themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water. They love the creature more than the Creator; and seek that happiness in the things of time and sense which are to be found in thee alone. Turn away mine eyes, I beseech thee, from beholding vanity. And while the many are saying, Who will show us any good? lift thou up on me, O Lord, the light of thy reconciled countenance; and by the cross of Jesus, may I be crucified to the world, and the world to me. Henceforth enable me to set my affections on things above, and with sincerity to say, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of thee. Grant this, I beseech thee, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

THE RIGHTEOUS NOT FORSAKEN.

Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.—Psalm 71 : 9.

Among the many great advantages we derive from the word of God, this is none of the least; that it furnishes us with the most admirable matter for our prayers. The petitions which we find in the Scriptures are the most suitable that can be imagined, and express, in a wonderful manner, the best desires of a pious heart. On this account the book of Psalms, particularly, is highly to be prized; and the Christian may often adopt the petitions he finds there with the greatest satisfaction. How well is the petition in the text adapted to the desires of an aged Christian, sinking under the infirmities of years, conscious of needing divine support, and dreading, above all things, the loss of God's presence.

In our meditations on these words let us,

In the first place, consider The import of the petition itself; and

Secondly, The encouragement we have to expect a gracious answer.

1. The petition includes an acknowledgment of weakness, the weakness which is generally felt in advanced life. A few persons we read of, or meet with, who preserve their powers and faculties to a very old age. Such a man was Moses, when a hundred and twenty years old; "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Such another man was Caleb, a man who had "followed the Lord fully." When he claimed his promised portion in Canaan, he said to Joshua, "I am this day fourscore and five years old; and yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; (forty-five years before;) as my strength was then, even so is my strength now." But these are very uncommon cases. The usual period of human life seldom extends to more than threescore years and ten; and if, by reason of strength, it reaches further, yet is that strength attended with labor and sorrow. The eyes fail, the hearing fails, the memory fails, the limbs fail, the whole tabernacle totters and threatens a speedy fall. The mind, too, frequently becomes feeble and timid, inclined to sorrow and despondency. Under these painful circumstances, how needful, how desirable, is the divine assistance; and for this the Psalmist prays, verse the 12th, "O God be not far from me; O my God make haste for my help."

2. The petition in our text implies the experience of God's gracious presence and help in time past

and a very high esteem of its value and importance. Indeed this was expressed in the preceding verses. "Thou art my hope, O Lord God; thou art my trust from my youth; by thee have I been holden up from the womb: my praise shall be continually of thee." When he was a helpless infant it was God who supported him; and when a young man, it was God who protected him; and now he is old he trusts that God will not forsake him; as if he had said, Thou who didst help me when I could not help myself, wilt not abandon me now, when, through the infirmities of age, I am as helpless as I was then. Those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," cannot but earnestly desire the continuance of his presence. Those who have had communion with God in prayer, in his word, in his house, in his ordinances, know how to prize that privilege, and would dread nothing so much as being deprived of the influences of the Holy Spirit. Their language is, with the royal penitent, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

3. The petition seems to imply a consciousness of unworthiness, and that God might justly withdraw his presence and assistance. Humility is one of the fruits which Christians should bring forth in old age. The long experience they have had of the unutterable deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of their own hearts; the long war that has been waged within them between the flesh and the spirit; their numberless failures in all their duties; their backslidings in heart, if not in conduct, fill them with

shame and grief; they blush to lift up their faces to a holy God; they are ashamed and confounded, because "they bear the reproach of their youth," and of every succeeding period of life. They own, with sincerity, that they have been "unprofitable servants," who might justly be turned out of the family; and "barren trees" which have cumbered the ground, and would long ago have been cut down, had not the heavenly Husbandman pleaded, time after time, "Let them alone one year more." An aged Christian may not only say, (as in verse 7,) "I am as a wonder unto many," but "I am a wonder to myself;" that I, so unworthy and sinful a creature, should have been spared so long! This humbling sense of sinfulness and unworthiness will make the aged believer sincerely cry, "Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth."

4. This petition, that God would not forsake them, may with peculiar propriety be offered by the poor of the flock, who have outlived all, or nearly all their relations and friends, or have been forsaken by those from whom they expected better things. Many an aged Christian may say, with the Psalmist, (88:18,) "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." The companions of his youth are dead, or removed to a distance; the delight of his eyes is gone to the grave; the dear children who promised to be the staff of his old age are no more, or, what is worse, they shun his company and treat him with coldness, perhaps with contempt; and those who called themselves his

"friends" in the day of prosperity, and perhaps are themselves under great obligations to him, are ungrateful and unkind. Under these painful circumstances the petition in the text becomes doubly suitable; "Cast me not off, forsake me not." My relations and my friends have forsaken me; but thou, O God, art unchangeable in thy love, and having loved thine own, thou lovest them to the end. "When my father and my mother"—my wife, my husband, my son, my daughter, my companions "forsake me," be pleased, O Lord, to "take me up. Hide not thy face from me, put not thy servant away in anger; thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." Psalm 27:9, 10.

II. We may now proceed, in the second place, to notice the encouragement which God has given us in his word to expect a gracious answer to this petition.

There are many great and precious promises to this effect in the sacred Scriptures. A few shall be mentioned. Psalm 9:10, "Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." Psalm 37:28, "The Lord forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever." Psalm 94:14, "The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance." Timorous Christians, sensible of their frailty, may have many fears on this head, as intimated in Isaiah, 49:14, "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me;" but to this suspicion it is replied, in the next verse, "Can a woman forget

her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; but I will not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

But a Christian may say, I believe that God is indeed unchangeable, and will not forsake his own elect; but so treacherous is my deceitful heart that I often fear I shall forsake him. True, and so you certainly would, should he leave you to yourself; but mark what he has promised, Jeremiah, 32:40, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that *they shall not depart from me.*" He may, indeed, chastise his people for their wanderings; he may "visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless, his loving kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail." Psalm 89:32, 33. "And though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies." Lamentations, 3:22. In a word, this is his grand, comprehensive promise, originally made to Joshua, but equally made to every believer, Hebrews, 13:5, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." These words, in the original, contain five negatives, and may be read thus; "No, I will not leave thee; no, no, I will not forsake thee." This promise is peculiarly suited to the aged; and, above all, to persons in a low and afflicted state; for it is brought forward by St. Paul as an argument for

contentment: "Let your conversation be without *covetousness*, (a sin, by the way, to which old people are often tempted,) and be content with such things as ye have;" then the promise follows, "for he hath said, I will never leave thee," &c. and then another ground of encouragement is added; "So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Oh what wonderful provision has the God of all grace made for the comfort of his people! Who should fear, having such precious promises as these?

But there is yet another promise, more particularly given to the aged, in Isaiah, 46:4, which deserves your special notice. "Even to your old age, I am He; and even to your hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

JEHOVAH, the self-existent, the eternal God, is the speaker. I—the great "I AM—who is, who was, who is to come; the ALMIGHTY." The word "I" is repeated five times in this one verse, that we may better regard the divinity of the glorious Promiser. "*I have made*," saith he. I am thy Creator; "he made us, and not we ourselves," we are the clay, he is the potter. He is the father of our spirits, and the former of our bodies. By him "we were fearfully and wonderfully made." He well knows our feeble frame; "he remembereth that we are dust;" he therefore well knows how much we need his help. And if we are Christians indeed, we are "created anew in Christ;" we are in the highest sense "his

workmanship;" and we are sure that he will have a regard to the work of his own hands; his new-creating work. Let us not, therefore, give way to fear, and "forget the Lord our Maker, He who stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth;" rather let us in every trouble say, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?"

"I will *bear*," saith he, and "I will *carry*, even to your hoar hair," even to extreme old age, when "the grasshopper is a burden." Aged people are seldom without their burdens. Besides those infirmities and pains which are themselves a heavy burden, they have sometimes a load of worldly cares from straitened circumstances; the support of children or grand-children who are unable to provide for themselves; and in some instances the additional and heaviest load of all, the burden of guilt on their consciences, and the slavish fear of death and eternity.

What an all-sufficient friend, then, is God in Christ, who freely pardons the sins of all who believe; who invites us to the throne of grace, not only that we may "obtain mercy," but also that we may "find grace to help in time of need." Surely, then, may the believer say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and *strength*." He will *carry; he will bear*. So it is written of the good shepherd, Isaiah, 40:11, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and *carry* them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." And if it be so, the question that follows,

verse 27, may be proposed to the reason and conscience of the believer; "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" Hearken to the reply; "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint, and the young men shall utterly fail; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Oh what a divine cordial is this for an aged saint?

There is one more clause in this precious promise, *I will deliver*. Having been borne up, and carried through life, even to old age, complete deliverance shall crown the whole. Jesus Christ came to deliver his people from the curse of the law—to deliver them from this present evil world, and from the slavish fear of death, and to support them in the final struggle. Many are the fears which some pious people feel in the prospect of death, and frequently, of the pains of dying. But how unreasonable are these misgivings! Hath not the Lord who created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, said, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not

be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Instead, then, of fearing lest God should cast thee off in the time of old age, or forsake thee in the closing scene, when heart and flesh shall fail, adopt the Psalmist's words of faith: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;" and for this good reason, "for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psalm 23:4.

CONCLUSION.

Happy is the man who, with a humble and sincere heart, offers up to God the petition in the text; who is not only sensible of his bodily weakness, but who has had some experience of the gracious presence and blessing of God; who is deeply sensible of his extreme unworthiness of that privilege, and though poor and needy, neglected and deserted by his friends, looks up with humble hope to his heavenly Father, his unchangeable Friend. Such a man has nothing to fear, but every thing to hope. He is faithful who made the promise; he cannot deceive, or forget, or forsake those who flee to him for shelter, and take refuge under the cover of his wings. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not a jot or a tittle of his word shall fail.

But is the language of the text the language of every aged person, of every reader of this discourse?

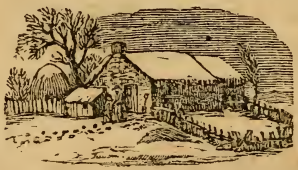
Would to God it were. But may it not be feared that some are, to use the words of Scripture, "stout-hearted, and far from righteousness?" Alas! they never knew the pleasure of communion with God, nor desired to know it. The help of fellow-creatures they are glad to receive; but they are strangers to prayer, and ask not help of God. On the contrary, the horrid language of wicked men is, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." This is a sad case. A poor old infirm man or woman, full of pains and aches, tottering on the brink of the grave, and in danger of dropping into hell—is a shocking spectacle! May God, of his infinite goodness, awaken such to discover their danger, and instantly to flee for mercy to Jesus Christ, the only "deliverer from the wrath to come," lest, when he appears the second time to judgment, he should utter the dreadful sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed," &c. Come then to him without delay, and take the text for your prayer, "Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth."

PRAYER.

O God, I humbly approach thee with the words which thou hast taught me. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. I am indeed weak both in body and mind,

and now feel more than ever the need of thy gracious help. That help, O Lord, thou hast often afforded in time past; and now, when my natural strength faileth, and creature-comforts fail, be thou the strength of my heart, and lift upon me, in the valley of darkness, the light of thy reconciled countenance. In the Lord Jesus let me daily find my righteousness and my strength.

Thanks be to thee, O my God, for thy precious promises. Thou hast said thou wilt not forsake thy people, nor suffer them to forsake thee; thou who hast made them hast promised to bear, to carry, and to deliver them; and hast solemnly assured them that thou wilt never, never, never forsake them. O God, increase my faith in these promises, so that I may trust and not be afraid; but with humble, holy boldness, say, The Lord is my helper; and if the Lord be with me and for me, who can be against me? None shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord. Amen and Amen.



PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

THE AGED PILGRIM

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.—Genesis, 47:8, 9.

THESE words contain a question and an answer, a very common question, a very uncommon answer. The question was proposed to Jacob by Pharaoh, king of Egypt; the answer was given by the aged patriarch, the grandson of Abraham, who also walked in the steps of his faith.

Joseph, who introduced Jacob to the king, was the favorite son of Jacob. When a youth, he was envied and hated by his elder brethren, and by them cruelly sold to strangers, by whom he was carried into Egypt; where, after many sufferings, he was highly advanced, and became the prime minister of the king. Being endued with the spirit of prophecy, he foretold seven years of approaching scarcity, and

by his prudence prevented a destructive famine. The sons of Jacob, who then sojourned in Canaan, were obliged to repair to Joseph, (whom they did not then recollect,) who repeatedly supplied them with corn; and afterward invited their father to come into Egypt and sojourn there. He came; he was transported with joy in beholding his long-lost son, and said to him, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive!"

Joseph afterward introduced his venerable father to the king, who could not but take an interest in the parent of a favorite minister, who had saved the country from starvation. When the pious patriarch appeared in the royal presence, the king asked him the question in our text. The great age and the many afflictions of his life had probably made him look extremely aged: it was, therefore, natural to ask, "How old art thou?" or, as it is rendered more literally in the margin, "How many are the days of the years of thy life?" Jacob replies "The days of the years of"—not of my *life*, in the words of Pharaoh, but "the days of the years of my *pilgrimage*," &c. This was a peculiar answer; it was the answer of a pious man, not of "a man of the world, whose portion is in this life;" but of a believer in the revelation and promise which God had made of a heavenly inheritance, toward which he was travelling. Pharaoh was an ignorant heathen; a worshipper of false gods and images, and, perhaps, could scarcely understand what Jacob meant by his being a pilgrim; but the good patriarch was not ashamed of his reli-

gion, and, as a man of God, he takes this fair opportunity of declaring his faith before a pagan prince.

This circumstance is noticed by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews, (chap. 11 : 13.) "These all died in faith," (he refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,) "not having received the promises," that is, the promise of Canaan, and the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations were to be blessed; "but they were persuaded of them, and embraced them;" and then observe what follows; they *confessed*, as Jacob did in the text, "that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." A similar confession was made in after-times by king David, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were," (Psalm 39 : 12,) and again, "I am a stranger in the earth, hide not thy commandments from me." And St. Peter, in the New Testament, uses the same term as applicable to Christians, (1 Peter, 2 : 11,) "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

We shall now proceed to a consideration which well deserves the special notice of aged persons: it is this—

All real Christians are pilgrims and strangers in the present world, travelling toward their heavenly home.

And here we shall show—from whence they begin their journey—the great object they have in view—the road which they travel—their temper and

conduct on their way, and—the final result, in the attainment of their object.

1. They forsake their native home, or, in other words, their original state and condition. "All men have sinned." "There is none righteous, no, not one." "Every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The Christian pilgrim is convinced of this; he sees, he feels that he is a sinner; and, as a sinner, exposed to the dreadful wrath and anger of a just and holy God. This makes him uneasy. It excites alarm. He is afraid, as well he may be, of the judgments of God. He wishes to "flee from the wrath to come;" and he asks, with trembling anxiety, "What must I do to be saved?" He now begins to pray. He begins to read his Bible. He repairs to the house of God, and listens to the Gospel with a seriousness unknown before. He learns from the word that "except a man repent he must perish;" that except "he believes in Christ he must be condemned;" that "except he be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." He perceives, therefore, that he must be brought out of his original state, and begin a new life. This is like a traveller leaving his home, which he finds is no longer safe; or, to adopt the similitude of Bunyan, in his "Pilgrim's Progress," he sees that he must immediately quit "*the city of Destruction*," and escape for his life.

And thus he resembles Abraham, the father of the faithful, whose first act of faith was obedience to the divine command, "Get thee out of thy country, and

from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee;" "and he went out, not knowing whither he went." And by the same faith "he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents:" but "he had no possession in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on." In like manner, real Christians are called, effectually called, by the word and Spirit of God, out of a state of ignorance, carnality, and unbelief, to commence their spiritual pilgrimage.

2. They have a great object in view. Mistaken men, ignorant of the Gospel, have sometimes become pilgrims. The Mahomedans will travel hundreds of miles to their prophet's tomb at Mecca; and idolatrous Hindoos will travel equal distances to the temple of Juggernaut, in India. Their object is utterly vain and foolish; but the object of the Christian is no less than *everlasting life—eternal glory!* This is the prize of our high calling. Faith has taught the Christian to look, "not at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal." Compared with the realities of eternity, what are all the affairs of time? The riches, and honors, and pleasures of this world dwindle into nothing; "they are less than nothing, and vanity." A believer often dwells, in his solemn meditations, on the astonishing subject which was well expressed by a pious and eloquent writer: "Suppose," said he, "the earth to be entirely composed of the finest particles of sand, and that an angel, once in a thousand years, was commissioned

to remove one of these particles, and that man was to exist till the whole globe was destroyed: thousands and thousands of years would roll on ere the smallest diminution would be perceptible: but think, if the powers of imagination do not fail in the inquiry, of the millions of ages which must elapse ere the quarter, the half, the whole, be annihilated! Yet, even then, eternity is but commencing."

Surely, then, with such a view of eternity, the salvation of the soul ought to be the grand object of pursuit. To avoid an eternity of torment, and to secure an eternity of happiness, are matters of infinite importance, and call for the utmost diligence, zeal, and perseverance.

Now, to attain this object, what is necessary? Sin must be pardoned. Our innumerable sins call for vengeance: they must be blotted out, or we must suffer deserved punishment. Blessed be the God of infinite mercy, "there is forgiveness with him," even for the chief of sinners; and through faith in the blood of Jesus, all our sins, however many, may be blotted out. And as heaven, the pilgrim's great object, is a prepared place for a prepared people, we must "be born again;" we must be made "new creatures;" we must be "renewed" by the Holy Spirit; we must die to sin, and live to righteousness. With this object in view, the Christian pilgrim hears, and reads, and watches, and prays, that "being made free from sin, and become a servant to God, he may have his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

3. Consider next, the road which he travels. Men have invented various ways in which they hope to obtain the divine favor: "by works of righteousness which they have done:" by their charities, their devotions, and goodness of heart, they have presumed to be able to merit the salvation of their souls; but these the Christian entirely discards; and says with St. Paul, "Not by works of righteousness which I have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved me, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. By grace am I saved, through faith; and that not of myself; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

Jesus Christ himself said, "*I am the way;* no man cometh unto the Father but by me." He is "the new and living way;" the consecrated way; the way into the holiest of all, even into heaven; and in this way the believer has the privilege of "drawing near to God with a true heart, in full assurance of faith," Heb. 10:19, &c.

4. Let us now observe what is the temper and conduct of the pilgrim while pursuing his way to the kingdom. Christ said to his disciples, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." One design of the death of Christ was to "deliver them from this present world;" and one of his last petitions for them was, "that they might be kept from the evil." The world is a dangerous foe to the soul. Fallen man has forsaken God, and chosen the world for his portion and chief good. Every thing in it tempts him to live a life of sense; to gratify his eye,

his ear, his taste, his touch; this is his study, his constant pursuit, and only delight. But believers in Christ are delivered from this bondage, and each may say in his measure, with the apostle, "I am crucified with Christ; the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The world has lost its charms; it is no longer his chief good. He is "in the world," but not "of the world." He uses the world, but does not abuse it. He has his temporal affairs to manage; the duties of his calling and relations to discharge; he is not idle, nor careless, nor dishonest; but endeavors to glorify God whether he eats or drinks, or labors, or suffers; but he is not at home; he is a pilgrim on his journey, and must not be hindered. If a traveller meets with poor lodging and entertainment he does not much regard it. It rather urges him to press forward; and if he stops at a pleasant inn and is well entertained, he does not think of making it his abode; his ultimate object is always kept in view, and he proceeds on his way, recruited by his rest, and invigorated for his journey.

John Bunyan has happily represented this in his Pilgrim's Progress, where Christian and his companion pass through "Vanity Fair." The fair abounded with a variety of curious objects, and the pilgrims were strongly solicited to purchase; but they were indifferent to all the baubles there exhibited, and by their total disregard of them gave great offence to the people of the fair. And thus it will ever be: the world is sorely displeased with real Christians, because they do not value its wares; because they do

not love its vain and wicked pleasures and amusements; but faith will persevere, whatever be the consequences.

5. The Christian pilgrim will do well at last. "It shall be well with the righteous." He that faints not shall reap; he shall receive "the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul." This was his object at setting out; this was his object all along the road, even to the end of it; and having "fought the good fight, and finished his course, and kept the faith, he shall receive the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give him at that day." He must, indeed, ford the river which separates earth from heaven; as in old time, the children of Israel must pass through the Jordan to enter the promised land; but the Lord can either so order it, that, like them, he shall pass the bed of the river dry shod; or, if not, he will fulfill that precious promise, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

CONCLUSION.

READER, "*how old art* THOU?" You answer sixty, seventy, possibly eighty. You have lived long. Much longer than many of your friends or kindred. You have had many mercies—mercies without number; you have lived in a Christian country; and in the

course of seventy years you have had three thousand six hundred and forty Sabbaths, and might have heard at least twice that number of sermons, and might have read the Bible through fifty times. What benefit have you derived from all these privileges? Has your life, or any part of it, been a Christian pilgrimage? When did you leave the city of Destruction? Has heaven been the constant object of your pursuit? Has Christ been your way, and holiness your walk? Have you been dead to the world, and alive to God? Important inquiries! Have you lived in folly, vanity, sin, worldly-mindedness? and must you now say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and *I am not saved.*" Jer. 8:20. Alas! alas! how mournful is this—*not saved! not saved!* Then a long life has been thrown away. You are not saved yet. But, mark! if you are not saved soon, you must be lost for ever. O then "seek the Lord, while," as we hope, "he may yet be found;" call upon him, in earnest prayer for mercy, lest he say, Depart from me for ever.

But let the Christian pilgrim review, with great thankfulness, mingled with deep humility, all the way he has travelled. The long journey will soon end, and that end will be peace.

A feeble saint shall win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way.

PRAYER.

O God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob, who didst lead and guide them all the days of their pilgrimage, and hast also called me, by thy grace, to imitate their example, and to pursue the same course of faith and self-denial; strengthen me, I beseech thee, with might by thy Spirit, in the inner man, that I may not turn back nor turn aside, but hold on my way, growing stronger and stronger to the end. Preserve me from being slothful, and enable me to follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises: and may I show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. Preserve me, O God, from the love of the world; let me not be deceived by its lying vanities; but may I be crucified to the world by the cross of Christ; and as I advance in years, and every day draw nearer to the grave, may I become more and more dead to the world; more and more alive to God; more confident in Christ, more lively in hope, and more spiritual in my affections: and O grant me at last an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

HYMN.

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven——
Feed me till I want no more.

Open, Lord, the crystal fountain
Whence the healing streams do flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer——
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises——
I will ever give to thee.

PEACE IN DEATH,

OR

SIMEON'S SONG.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.—Luke, 2:29, 30.

AGED people, if serious, will "so number their (remaining) days that they may apply their hearts to wisdom;" to "the fear of the Lord," or true religion, "for that is wisdom." They know that "they must needs die," and that death cannot be far distant. How desirable, then, is it to die *safely*, and to die *in peace*, as that good old man Simeon did, whose words, in the prospect of death, we have just now read.

Of this good man we have an excellent character. He was "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." He was an honest and upright man in all his dealings with men: this was commendable; but he was more, he was devout, he was a godly, praying man; and more still, he was one who waited for

the consolation of Israel; that is, for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of Israel, and of the world. The Jews in general were looking for the promised Messiah, the Christ; but most of them looked only for a temporal prince, who should raise them to great worldly prosperity; but Simeon, being taught of God, looked and longed for the coming of a Savior—a Savior from sin, and from the wrath of God due to sin; one who should "redeem Israel from all their iniquities."

Simeon had also the spirit of prophecy; and it was revealed to him that he should not see death; that is, that he should not die till the Messiah came; that he should be gratified with a sight of the expected Savior in person.

By an intimation from the same Spirit, he was directed to go to the Temple at the very time when the mother and supposed father of Jesus brought the holy infant there that they might present him to God, as it was ordained by the law concerning the first-born.

Simeon, who probably had not before seen him, perhaps had not even heard of his birth, knew, by inspiration, that the infant presented was the Holy one of God; the expected consolation of Israel, for whom he waited. Then, taking the holy child into his arms, with sacred delight, he blessed God for his unspeakable gift, and for indulging him with a spectacle which many kings and prophets had in vain desired to behold; and now, having lived long enough, he expressed not only a willingness but a desire to

depart; for, said he, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation:" a salvation not for the Jews only, but for "all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

Happy, indeed, was Simeon, thus to meet death! He had welcomed Christ, and then he could welcome death. May this be our happy experience when we come to die; and in humble hope that it may be so, let us seriously consider the text under the three following particulars.

I. Jesus Christ is God's salvation.

II. Believers obtain a spiritual sight of him.

III. They are then prepared to die.

I. Jesus Christ is here called SALVATION; not a *Savior* only, which is the usual name, but SALVATION, which is a stronger term, and more emphatic. Thus he is named in Isaiah, 12:1, 2. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away and thou comfortedst me. Behold! *God is my* SALVATION. I will trust, and not be afraid; for the *Lord* JEHOVAH is my strength and my song, He also is become my SALVATION." In this most illustrious prophecy, which doubtless refers to Christ, (for there is no other Savior,) he is styled THE LORD JEHOVAH—a name peculiar to the Most High; he is truly and properly God; "God manifest in the flesh—the WORD made flesh;" the glorious person whom Simeon embraced in his arms, and whom he called by the same name as Isaiah did, SALVATION. And he is

properly so called, because he is the SUM and SUBSTANCE, the AUTHOR and GIVER of the whole salvation of all the elect people of God, from first to last; the Alpha and the Omega; yea, in the whole of our redemption, "Christ is all, and in all."

This is called (Heb. 2 : 3) *a great salvation:* it is, indeed, unspeakably great; incomparably greater than any deliverance ever wrought for a person or a nation. It is *eternal salvation*, the blessings of it extending to all eternity.

It is a salvation from the guilt and punishment of sin; a deliverance from the terrible wrath and anger of a just and offended God; so that those who are interested in it "have passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation." It is also a deliverance from the tyranny of sin, that it should no longer reign in our mortal bodies, but that we should be "living sacrifices," consecrated to God. It is a deliverance from Satan, the great deceiver and destroyer of mankind; for all believers are translated "from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son." It is a deliverance from the slavery and love of the world, enabling believers to transfer their affections from the trifling objects of time and sense, and to place them on things spiritual, heavenly, and divine. It is a deliverance from death; from the slavish fear of it, and from the fatal sting of it, which is sin. This great salvation reaches to the eternal world; to a state of unspeakable happiness and glory, in which the spirit, perfected in holiness, shall, at the resurrection, be reunited to the

glorified body, and both be completely happy in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.

Well, then, might this holy man of God exult when he took the infant Savior in his arms! Well might he break forth into thanksgiving, and bless God, that, according to his promise, he had lived to this period, and beheld with his own eyes "the Seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head;" the Seed of Abraham, "in whom all nations should be blessed;" the Seed of David, "who should sit upon the throne and reign for ever."

We who are now upon earth cannot expect the same favor that Simeon enjoyed. When Jesus Christ had finished the great work he came to earth to do, he ascended up into heaven and is no longer visible to mortal eyes; but there is another, and, indeed, a superior way in which he may now be seen; and this is what we proposed in the second place to notice.

II. Believers obtain a spiritual sight of Christ. Their faith supplies the place of sight; for "Faith is the substance (or the confidence) of things hoped for, the evidence (or conviction) of things not seen." Heb. 11:1. Thus Moses endured his labors and his sufferings, for "by faith he saw Him who is invisible." Heb. 11:27. He saw Him by the eyes of his mind; he was fully persuaded of the truth of the promises God had made to him; he was sure that God would fulfil his word; and, therefore, "he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of king Pharaoh." Long before his appearance on earth he spake thus

by the prophet, (Isaiah, 45:22,) "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." As the Old Testament saints looked to him by faith before his incarnation, so are we to look at him now. Many of those who saw him in Judea, and beheld his miracles, derived no spiritual advantage from the sight. Many of them despised and rejected him, as the prophet foretold, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." There were, however, a happy few, spiritually enlightened, who could say, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We may now behold his spiritual glory as set forth in the Gospel. So St. Paul speaks, (2 Cor. 3:18,) "We all, with open (or unveiled) face, beholding as in a glass (or mirror) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The believers of old had only the shadow of the things of Christ: we may see them far more clearly, the true image of heavenly things being clearly reflected in the mirror of the Gospel; but it is only by the light and teaching of the Holy Spirit that we can thus see them. The natural man sees them not; they must be "spiritually discerned:" and they are so discerned when the Holy Spirit, whose special office it is to glorify Christ in the hearts of believers, takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us. Then we see the great salvation, procured by the obedience and death of Jesus, to be exactly what we need. We believe

the testimony of God concerning him; we receive him as our Savior, and trust in him alone for eternal life.

There was a very striking emblem of this appointed by God, when the children of Israel were travelling to Canaan through the wilderness. For the punishment of their sins, God sent fiery flying serpents among them, whose sting was painful and mortal, so that many of the people died. Greatly alarmed and terrified, they entreated Moses to pray for them. He did so. And the Lord heard. He ordered Moses to form the image of a serpent in brass, and then to elevate it on a high pole in the midst of the camp, promising that whosoever, being bitten, should look upon that figure, should live. It was done: they looked, and they lived. Our blessed Savior in his discourse with Nicodemus, refers to this miraculous method of cure, saying, (John, 3 : 14, 15,) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We have been bitten by the serpent of hell; sin, like a venomous poison, rankles in our veins; if a remedy be not quickly found we must perish. But a Savior is provided: he became man, was made in the likeness of sinful flesh; and was lifted up, not to an earthly throne, but on the cross, where he redeemed us from the curse by being made a curse for us; and now he is lifted up in the word of the Gospel, and thus lifted up, "he draws all men unto him," that is, all who, feeling their need of him, look to him by faith, and are healed. "For this is the

will of God, that every one who (thus) seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." John, 6:40. Truly blessed are they who have thus believed; they look to Jesus and are lightened; and they proceed in their heavenly course, still "looking to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of their faith;" and hoping in due time to receive the end of their faith, even the (complete) salvation of their souls. But they must die before they receive this, and death is terrible to nature; but it is not so to grace, for death is become the friend, not the enemy of a Christian; and he may now say, with aged Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And this is the third thing we were to consider.

III. Those who, by faith, have seen God's salvation, are prepared to die, and to die in peace.

The great end of life is answered when we are prepared for a better world; for life is but, as it were, the porch of eternity. Believers should be willing, at any age, to depart, that they may be with Christ; but aged believers, especially, should be ready and willing to die. Thus it was with Abraham, the father of the faithful. God had made him a promise, (Gen. 15:15,) that "he should go to his fathers in peace; he should be buried in a good old age;" and so it came to pass; for thus we read, (Gen. 25:8,) that "Abraham gave up the ghost, (or spirit,) and died in a good old age, (an hundred and seventy-five,) an old man, and full of years." His old age was *a*

good old age—good both in soul and body. Probably he had many infirmities at that very advanced period; but these, no doubt, were for his good; and when the appointed hour came he was quite willing to die, for he was *full of years*, or, as it might be rendered, *he was satisfied*. He had had enough of life; and wished to be "gathered to his people;" his body to the congregation of the dead, his spirit to the assembly of the blessed.

All believers, like Abraham and Simeon, may well be willing to die, for they die *safely*, and have cause to die joyfully; safely, because death hath no sting to them; and joyfully, because death is their gain. "The sting of death is sin;" it was by sin that death entered into the world, and the fear of the deserved punishment of sin in a future state is that which chiefly renders death terrible. But Jesus Christ, the second Adam, has brought life into the world; he took our nature, and by his obedience unto death "brought in an everlasting righteousness," which is upon all that believe, so that "there is no condemnation to them;" they "have passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation." "He that believeth in me," saith Christ, "shall never die;" he shall not die eternally—shall not undergo "the second death." Death hath changed both its nature and name; it is now called a *sleep*. Our Lord said of Lazarus, when a corpse, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." He did so by raising him from the grave; and in like manner, all they "who sleep in Jesus

shall God bring with him." Blessed, therefore, are they "who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors, and their works follow them.

Simeon was not only *willing* to die, but *desirous* of dying. He begs permission *to depart*—not to cease to exist; but being "absent from the body, to be present with the Lord." The believer's desire of death should not be merely to obtain deliverance from the infirmities of age, or severe pains and diseases of body, though such deliverance may, in submission to the divine will, be lawfully desired; but rather to be "delivered from the burden of the flesh;" "the law in the members which wars against the law of the mind;" to be perfected in holiness; to join the general assembly of just men made perfect; and, above all, to be with Jesus, "the Mediator of the new covenant," the precious Redeemer; to behold his glory, to see his face, to sing his praise, and to be for ever with the Lord. Thus "to live is Christ! thus to die is gain!"

CONCLUSION.

And now, will not every reader say, "Let me die the death of righteous Simeon, and let my last end be like his."

O let me die his death! all nature cries—
Then live his life—all nature falters there.

What was the life of Simeon? He was just. Are you so? He was devout. Are you so? He waited for the consolation of Israel. Do you look for consolation in Christ? or in sinful indulgences, in the lusts of the flesh, in the vanities of the world? If you have lived an ungodly life, and neglected the great salvation, how can you expect to die in peace? O then, seek the Lord in earnest prayer, and without a moment's delay, lest the things that belong to your peace should be for ever hidden from your eyes. Still he calls you; he knocks at the door of your hearts. O admit the Savior; embrace him, like Simeon, in the arms of your faith, and then your end, like his, will be peace.

Let aged Christians be reconciled to death. It does not become an aged believer to be unwilling to die. You have lived many years; the greater part of your friends have gone before you. "Gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober and hope to the end." Yet a little while, a little longer exercise of faith and patience, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

PRAYER.

O eternal, almighty, and most gracious God, thou didst permit sin to enter into this world, and death by sin, so that death passeth upon all men, for all have sinned. I have sinned, O Lord, and know, as-

suredly, that thou wilt bring me to the grave, to the house appointed for all living. Death is terrible to nature, and it is an awful thing to die. It is sin that makes it so, for the sting of death is sin: therefore, O most merciful God, who in thine infinite love didst give thy dear Son to die for sinners, the just for the unjust; grant me, by faith, an interest in Jesus, who is the life. I desire to look to him, and believe in him, as able and willing to save the chief of sinners, to save even me, an aged sinner, on the brink of the grave and of eternity. O thou God of peace, grant to me joy and peace in believing; and especially in a dying hour: and when that solemn hour shall come, enable me to say, with holy Simeon, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST PRAYER.

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.—Acts, 7: 59.

"It is appointed unto men once to die." "We must needs die." "There is no discharge in that war." Now, as death is certain and unavoidable, and as the consequences of death are of eternal importance, the greatest concern of life is to be prepared to die, to die with safety, to die in peace, and with the joyful, well-founded hope of eternal life. Thus Stephen, the first Christian martyr, died. He was a good man, "full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost;" and a bold preacher of Jesus Christ; by which he incurred the displeasure of the Jews, who falsely accused him of blasphemy, and with savage fury stoned him to death. But the Savior, for whom he suffered, appeared to him in a glorious vision; he felt no fear; but trusting in Jesus, he committed his departing soul into his hands, saying, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit;" and then offering one petition more, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," "he fell asleep," dying amidst a shower of stones, with as much composure as a person falls asleep.

Who would not wish to die as Stephen did? Not indeed by the hand of violence, but with as much peace and composure of spirit. Is not this especially desirable to the aged, who know that according to the course of nature their dying hour cannot be very distant, and most likely is very near. Let us, then, contemplate the death of Stephen, and see what were the grounds and reasons of that happy state of mind which he then enjoyed, and with a fervent desire that we also may "die the death of the righteous," and that our end may be peaceful like his. For this purpose we shall make a few observations.

1. We may observe that *Stephen, on the approach of death, resorted to prayer.* He did not then *begin* to pray. He was a man of prayer. This is certain, for he was "a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost." Every believer prays continually, and his faith is peculiarly exercised in his prayers; and a principal work of the Holy Spirit is to assist us in praying. But prayer, which is always needful, is especially so when the hour of our departure is at hand. Then, when flesh and heart are failing, when we are closing our eyes upon this world, when the state of our probation is concluding, when, perhaps, the tempter is making his last effort to distress us, when we are just about to appear before the tribunal of God, and to enter upon an unknown, untried, unchangeable state; then, then assuredly, prayer is essentially necessary, if indeed we are then, which is not always the case, in possession of our mental powers, and

not rendered incapable of prayer by the extremity of pain and suffering, or delirium. Yes, as it is good to *live* praying, it is also good to *die* praying, "for we need the strength we never had, to do the work we never did."

Observation 2. *Stephen's prayer shows that his grand concern was for his immortal spirit.* He considered the value of his soul when he first embraced the Gospel and believed in Jesus for its salvation; when he risked his character and his life by espousing his persecuted cause: and now, when death, in an awful form, stared him in the face, he discovers no anxiety for life, no fear of death, nor prays for the interposition of miraculous power to rescue him from his bloody foes; for he knew that God could easily have delivered him out of their hands; but his whole concern is for the immortal spirit, which would soon be separated from the mortal body. He had uniformly acted according to that grand maxim of our Lord, implied in the question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" And now he dies depending on the grace and faithfulness of Christ, who said, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." He regarded the direction of his Master, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Matt. 10:28. The power of men was limited to the body; the soul was out of their reach; and he commits it, in this short prayer, to Jesus, his God and

Savior, who would receive it, and make it happy for ever.

Observation 3. *The spirit of man dies not with the body, but passes into a new state of existence.* So Stephen assuredly believed, or he would not have offered this petition. If he had thought, as some do, that the spirit ceases to live and act at death, he would have committed his body, and not his spirit, to Christ, looking only for the resurrection of that body at the last day. The testimony of Scripture is clear and full on this head. When Solomon speaks of the infirmities of age and their issue in death, he says, "Then shall the dust return to the earth, as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God, who gave it." Eccl. 12:7. The body, doomed, by the original sentence on the first transgressor, to death and dissolution, returns to the earth from which it was taken; but the spirit does not die; it returns to the God who gave it; it goes to God as a judge, to give an account of itself, and to exist either with the "spirits in prison," (1 Peter, 3:19,) or with "the spirits of just men made perfect," in the paradise of God. Happy they, who, by faith in Christ, the Mediator, have committed their souls unto his merciful and faithful hands; a believer may then, in imitation of our Lord himself, commit his spirit into the hands of his Father, and say, "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Thou hast "redeemed me to God by thy blood." I am thine; save me. Receive the spirit thou hast redeemed, and let

me receive "the end of my faith, the salvation of my soul."

That the human spirit lives after the death of the body, is a most "wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort;" and the following texts of Scripture fully confirm it. Our Savior said to the dying malefactor on the cross, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke, 23:43. Our Lord, referring to the title of Jehovah, as "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," said, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" surely, then, these patriarchs, though their bodies had been many ages in the grave, were then living in spirit. St. Paul, referring to a miraculous manifestation of God to him, says, that "whether he was then in the body, or out of the body, he could not tell," (2 Cor. 12:2, 3,) which proves his belief that the spirit may exist when separate from the body. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man, (Luke, 16,) shows that the spirits of both existed after their death; and the rich man, then in torments, desired that a messenger might be sent to his surviving brethren on earth to warn them of their danger. The apostle Paul, when speaking of being in a strait between two, not knowing whether to prefer living longer in the world, or dying out of it, says, "for me to live is Christ, and *to die is gain.*" To live longer in the world would be better for the church; but to die, and "to be with Christ is," said he, "far better" for myself. Phil. 1:21—23. But if the spirit does not survive the body, his death would

not be gain to himself, while it would be a serious loss to the church.

Another text is remarkably plain and decisive: (2 Cor. 5:8,) St. Paul, speaking of the assurance of faith and hope, which he and others possessed, says, "We are always confident, knowing that whilst we are *at home in the body*, we are *absent from the Lord;* we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be *absent from the body*, and *present with the Lord*." He had not a doubt that the moment he should die, and the spirit be *absent* from the body, he should be present with the Lord, according to our Lord's own prayer for his disciples, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be *with me, where I am*, that they may behold my glory." John, 17:24.

Observation 4. In the last place, we observe that *the prayer of Stephen expresses his confidence in Christ, as able to receive and bless his separate spirit.* The Christian, whose life "in the flesh has been a life of faith in the Son of God," must also die in faith; he lived, trusting in an unseen Savior; and he ventures by the same faith into the unseen world. "Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel," and clearly revealed the future and eternal state; but yet we are only partially acquainted with the nature of it. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be;" but it is our happiness to know that the Lord Jesus has dominion over the world of spirits. When he appeared in Patmos, to John his beloved disciple, he uttered these encouraging words, "Fear

not; I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of *hell* (or rather of *the invisible world*) and of death." Rev. 1:18. The future world is, as yet, to us, the invisible world: so it is represented not only in the Old but in the New Testament; but Christ has the key of it; he has also the key of *death*, by which believers pass into it. Admission into heaven is at the disposal of Christ; "he opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers." The Christian therefore has nothing to fear; but may, with cheerful confidence, pray, with dying Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

This holy confidence may safely rest on the POWER, the GRACE, and the FAITHFULNESS of Jesus Christ.

1. The POWER of Christ. When Jesus was about to ascend up into heaven, he said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." On earth he is King of kings and Lord of lords. All nations, with their whole population, from the prince to the peasant, are under his control. "He is Lord of all." And his dominion extends to all worlds, and all their inhabitants. He has also all power *in heaven;* for he is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." This Stephen believed; and therefore with confidence committed his soul to Christ, almost in the same words which our Savior on the cross addressed to God the Father. Surely, then, Stephen believed

in the proper divinity of the Redeemer, for this was the most solemn act of worship imaginable; and had he addressed this prayer to any other than the true God, he would have been guilty of an act of idolatry, in his last moments, which it is impossible to believe. But he "knew whom he had believed," and was satisfied that He was *able* to keep that sacred deposit which he had committed unto him; for he is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

2. Stephen knew the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though eternally rich, for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might become rich for ever. Stephen was an early disciple of the Lord Jesus, probably one of the hundred and twenty who kept close to the apostles; it is likely that he had heard him preach; that he had witnessed his miracles; beheld his agony on the cross; had seen him after his resurrection; and perhaps saw him ascend from Mount Olivet. He was one of those who "beheld his glory;" not the worldly glory of a Solomon, but the brighter "glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth." Could he then doubt the grace of Christ, or suspect a change in the affections of his heart? No; he believed that Jesus was "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." But had he doubted this, every doubt would have been banished from his mind when, "looking up steadfastly into heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," ready

to receive him. Well, then, might he, with perfect confidence, offer this petition, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

3. The FAITHFULNESS of the Lord Jesus. His word was pledged: "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." He knew that it was "impossible for God to lie;" and therefore he enjoyed "strong consolation;" the anchor of his soul entered within the veil, whither Jesus, the forerunner for him, had entered; thus his soul was kept sure and steadfast, unmoved by the storm now bursting on his head; and with a holy triumph over all his foes, he cries, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

A moment of life remains. And how was it employed? All was safe for himself; but his enemies, his cruel enemies, who now added the crime of murder to the sin of unbelief, what must become of them? For them he feels a deep concern; and like his blessed Master, who prayed for his executioners, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," he offers his last petition, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Oh, what a charming instance was this of the power of divine grace in his heart! What a lovely effect of the religion of Christ! and what a powerful recommendation of his religion to the spectators! Among these, and among the most furious of his murderers, was Saul of Tarsus, forward to assist in the destruction of this holy man of God. Surely Stephen's prayer was heard, at least for him, who, a few years after, was converted to Christ,

obtained mercy, and became a preacher of the faith which he tried to destroy, and at length a martyr, like Stephen, for Christ.

The triumphant death of this first Christian martyr affords a strong confirmation of the truth of the Gospel. Those who, like Stephen, had the best opportunity of examining the evidences of Christ's mission, and who must have detected any arts of deception, if such there had been, were so firmly convinced of the divinity of Christ, and of the holy religion which he founded, that they adhered to him in the face of the most cruel and furious opposition, gladly forsook all for his sake, and willingly met death in its most horrible forms, that they might seal their testimony to its truth with their blood.

Do *we* cordially receive this Gospel? Do *we* know it to be the power of God to our own salvation? Have *we* that faith in Jesus which works by love; which purifies the soul; which brings peace into our consciences, and love into our hearts? which crucifies us to the world, and the world to us? Have we committed our souls to Christ by faith, so that our dependance is on him alone for salvation and eternal life?

If not, how shall we dare to meet the king of terrors? When death approaches, and we find ourselves on the brink of eternity, what shall reconcile us to dissolution, and enable us, without dismay, to venture into the unknown world? How necessary

then is it, without delay, to flee to this only refuge, and to cry, "Lord, save us, or we perish!" He is able to save; he is willing to save, even to the uttermost. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

And let Stephen's courage and comfort in his last moments encourage and comfort every believer in Jesus. We cannot expect such a glorious vision of Christ as he had; but by faith we may "behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world," now on the throne; we may behold him as our gracious Advocate and Intercessor; and we may hope, that after a life of humble faith, and holy obedience, "an entrance will be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Amen.

PRAYER.

O most merciful God and Savior, enable me, by thy Holy Spirit, so to number my days that I may apply my heart to wisdom, and thus make it the chief concern of my remaining life to be prepared for death and heaven. Thou, O God, art the only refuge and hope of a sinner. To thee I now look up for mercy and grace; mercy to pardon all my sins, and grace to help in every time of need, and especially for that help which I shall need in the hour of death.

I desire to commit my soul into thy hands, O faithful Creator and most merciful Savior, and humbly beseech thee that it may be precious in thy sight. Wash me, I pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb, who was slain to take away the sin of the world; that whatever defilement it may have contracted in this miserable and wicked world, through the lusts of the flesh or the wiles of Satan, being purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before thee. When the hour of death arrives, deliver me from that fear of the last enemy; lift up the light of thy countenance upon me, and give me peace. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Amen.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

IN ADDITION TO BETWEEN FOUR AND FIVE HUNDRED

TRACTS

AND

CHILDREN'S TRACTS,

HAVE PUBLISHED SEVERAL

OCCASIONAL VOLUMES,

OF A

HIGHLY SPIRITUAL AND EVANGELICAL

CHARACTER,

Which are sold at the lowest prices, with reference to promoting their most extensive circulation and usefulness.

AMONG THESE OCCASIONAL VOLUMES, ARE

Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul.

Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest.

Twelve Sermons to the Aged, (in large type). By Rev. George Burder.

CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY, VIZ.

1. Memoir of Rev. John Newton.
2. do. of Archbishop Leighton.
3. do. of Rev. C. F. Swartz, Missionary to India.

To which, other publications of a kindred character will, from time to time, be added.

4872 YB 315

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01113 7389

DATE DUE

JUN 04 1996

Printed in USA

HIGHSMITH #45230