

Christian Thought & Work.

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CHRISTIAN
THOUGHT AND WORK

*A Series of Morning Meditations on
Passages of Scripture.*

BY

WILLIAM LINDSAY ALEXANDER, D.D.,
Minister of Augustine Church, Edinburgh.

"Quicken Thou me according to Thy word."—Ps. cxix. 25.

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PREFACE.

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THIS book is designed to minister somewhat to the quickening and strengthening of Christ's people, as persons called to live by faith in Him, and to do work for Him. The short essays of which it consists do not pretend to be either discourses or disquisitions; they aim simply at suggesting to the reader trains of thought and illustration which it may be cheering, invigorating, and otherwise profitable, for him to pursue. If they shall be the means of furthering, in any degree, the spiritual life, strength, and joy of those of his fellow-pilgrims who may peruse them, the author's main design shall have been attained.

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“ O my soul, learn to prepossess thyself every morning with the thoughts of God, and suffer not those fresh and sweet occupations of thy mind to be prostituted to earthly things ; for that is experimentally true which one in this case hath pertinently observed, that if the world get the start of religion in the morning, it will be hard for religion to overtake it all the day after.”—FLAVEL, Husbandry Spiritualized, p. 315, 8th ed. 1714.



I.

RELIGIOUS MEDITATION.

“ I will meditate in thy precepts.”—Ps. cxix. 15.

THESE words contain the resolution of one whose character and whose experience as a child of God render all his resolutions well worthy of our attentive consideration. We may suppose that such an one as the inspired author of this Psalm would not determine upon any course of religious action without carefully pondering the claims and the tendency of that course; nor would he, in addressing God, solemnly promise to follow that course unless he had good reason to believe that it was in accordance with His will. We may, therefore, regard these words as containing an impres-

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sive commendation to us of the duty of *religious meditation*.

To this subject it is of importance at all times that the thoughts of believers should be drawn, for the exercise is one of vast importance, and the duty is one we are sadly apt to forget. But especially in a busy, bustling age like the present, when so many voices are hailing us in every direction, when so many demands for immediate and active exertion are made upon us, and when, consequently, we are placed under strong temptation to snatch up hasty views of divine truth, and to content ourselves with believing and acting in religion rather by hazard and mechanically than as the result of deliberation and upon principle: especially in such an age does it become of importance that Christians should be reminded that meditation is one of their needful duties, and that as without it they cannot really prosper in the divine life, it behoves them to adopt and to carry out a resolution similar to that of the Psalmist when he said, "I will meditate in thy precepts."

The Hebrew word here translated "medi-

tate" signifies properly to speak or converse with one's self.* Hence it conveys the idea of seclusion, retirement, solitude, and, at the same time, of mental activity. The solitude of meditation is not the solitude of indolence, repose, or idle dreamy contemplation; nor is the activity of meditation the activity of debate, intercourse, conversation. In meditation the mind retreats within itself; but it retreats thither to think, to ponder, to reflect. To meditate, therefore, one must, first of all, *retire*. Amidst the bustle of the world, the din of conversation, the throng of society, there can be no meditation. To converse with self we must be alone; our sole companion our own thoughts, our sole witness God and Nature. When Isaac would meditate he walked at eventide into the fields,† where in the free air, and the calm face of nature, and the music of creation, he could find what tends to elevate the mind to God. When the Psalmist exhorts men to commune with their own hearts, his counsel to them is to do it by night upon

* שֵׁוּה, "the same as דִּבֶּר בְּלִבּוֹ, to talk with one's self, to meditate especially on divine things."—Gesenius on the word.

† Gen. xxiv. 63.

their bed, when all is still around them, and when no flaring lights, and no distracting shows, will be present to interrupt the current of their thoughts. The din and the daylight of society are hostile to quiet, concentrated, self-searching thought. The man that would truly meditate must bear to be alone. The world will ever be ready to obtrude itself upon us if we do not shut it out; and worldly thoughts are like motes in the eye, which vex the soul, and will not let it look calmly upwards. The wing that would soar into the serene air of the upper world must shake from it all clogs and fetters, and break away from whatever would tie it down to earth. "Meditation is the wing of the soul; when a Christian is belimed to earth, he cannot fly on this wing."* The man who shrinks from solitude, who sighs for society, who is never happy but in a crowd or a bustle, is not one who will make much progress in this heavenly art. It is good, therefore, to accustom ourselves to solitude; to retire upon ourselves; to shut out the world; and lock and bolt upon it the door of our heart.

* Thomas Watson, 1657.

Then, and not till then, will there be a possibility of our being able to say truly—"I will meditate in thy precepts."

But it is not enough that we be alone. Mere solitude is not meditation; and as little is mere quietude or mere musing. There are some minds that are given to a still, half-sleeping, half-waking *passivity* of thought, a habit which seems to be most seductive, but which is utterly unprofitable; "it is cloud pursuing cloud, forest after forest, and Alps upon Alps."* In this there is nothing manly, nothing vigorous, nothing that bespeaks the predominance of will in the soul. Nor is it enough that the mind should actively think, even though that thinking should be earnest. Meditation involves the ideas of *reflectiveness* and of *reverence*. It is a fixing of the mind upon something interesting to ourselves, and, at the same time, impressive. The man who meditates has his mind *occupied* by some lofty theme—something which draws his mind out and up to it—something which fixes and fastens his thoughts and feelings upon it. Like Mary,† he keeps the things

* Foster, Life, i. 90.

† Luke ii. 19.

on which he meditates, and ponders them in his heart. He broods over them, if haply they may become vital, and assume some new being in his soul. Especially, in religious meditation, the mind fixes upon God and the things of God; and that not after the manner of a philosopher or philosophical theologian, for the purpose of settling theoretical opinions or authoritative dogmas, but, above all, with a practical intent, for the purpose of extracting thence what shall be for the nourishment, comfort, and sanctification of the man's own soul. There are some whose thoughts of God are very hasty and transient; good, perhaps, as far as they go, but too quickly despatched to be of real benefit to the soul. An old writer has compared such to the dogs of the Nile, which "lap and away;" or "quicksilver, which cannot be made to fix." But if we would truly meditate, we must be as those who lie down by the bank of some quiet stream and listen to its gentle music, and at their ease drink their fill and are refreshed. This will secure us against a mercurial religious life; in such persons the soul becomes like a solid

and rich plate, on which are engraven in indelible lines "the image and likeness of God." The language of such is—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts, O God, delight my soul. I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love."*

In order to meditation, we must call to remembrance the things we have learned, and we must seek to store our minds with new and fresh truths. But neither of these is meditation itself. To remember a truth or a fact is not to ponder it. In the one case we simply *possess* the truth; in the other we *use* it. A passage remembered is so much food laid up in a store-house; a passage meditated is so much food eaten, and digested, and incorporated with ourselves. Memory is the casket which holds the jewels; meditation is that which brings them forth and arranges them upon the person, and sets out both to the best advantage. In like manner, the search after truth and knowledge is not to be confounded with a meditative use of knowledge after it is found. The former is purely an intellectual process; the latter depends

* Ps. xciv. 19; cxix. 123.

upon the will and affections. We may investigate truth without any emotion, either moral or natural, in reference to it; but we shall never meditate on truth unless we feel interested in it,* and attracted by it. The mere student has found his end when he has apprehended a conception, laid hold on an idea, demonstrated a fact, established a law; the meditative man finds his end only when he has turned the discovery over and over in his mind, has viewed it in all its bearings and relations, has questioned it as to its uses and worth, has inwrought it with his own being, and made it part of his own mind—the fruitful parent of new thoughts and new affections. To study is far more easy than to meditate, and hence it is far more common. Foster used to complain of the paucity of “idea’d people” that he encountered in society;* one may find knowing people in every street by scores. Of Christians who know the facts and truths of the Gospel there are many; of Christians who have deeply and faithfully pondered Scripture, the number is, I fear, very small.

* See his *Memoirs* by Ryland.

One often hears people complain, when exhorted to religious meditation, that they find it difficult to fix the mind on any particular subject. The whole range of divine truth seems to dance and flit before them, so that they cannot fasten on any subject on which specially to engage their thoughts. Now there can be no doubt that there are constitutional differences in this respect between different persons, and that it is not always the same with the same person at different times. Much, however, of the unsettledness thus complained of is the result of bad habit or the want of a proper mental discipline; and may be entirely overcome simply by a determined resolution that it shall be overcome. Multitudes want self-mastery simply because they have never fairly striven for it. Men allow themselves to tolerate vacant states of mind in which they are hardly conscious of thought at all; or they suffer themselves to receive passively such thoughts as may chance to float into their minds through any of the inlets that communicate with the outer world; or they indulge an idle love of dreamy contemplation, which is a species of mental epi-

cureanism, that like all epicureanism enervates and degrades. It is worth an effort to get the better of this impotency; and an effort manfully and perseveringly made in all that is necessary in order to get the better of it. One half hour spent in seriously contending against it will do much to eradicate it, and will give a man more real help heavenwards than a twelvemonth's reading or hearing of the best that has been written or can be spoken without it.

It is worthy of notice how frequently and emphatically the exercise of religious meditation is urged upon us in Scripture. When God summoned Joshua to his high post as leader of the people of Israel, his injunction to him was—"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein; for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous and shalt have good success."* When Paul wrote to Timothy to direct him how he was to behave himself as a teacher and ruler in the church, his counsel was, "Meditate

* Josh. i. 8.

upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that so thy profiting may appear unto all."* It is true these were both men called to high and difficult office; but what was needful for them in their peculiar sphere is no less needful for every one who has to fight the good fight, and is charged with the solemn responsibilities and the perilous adventures of the spiritual life. But it is not in relation to official men alone that the Bible speaks approvingly of religious meditation. How numerous are its commendations of this as pertaining to individual believers! The Book of Psalms is full of them. The good man "meditates in God's law day and night." "I meditate on all thy works," says David to the Lord; "I muse on the work of thy hands;" and David's soul was satisfied as with marrow and with fatness when he remembered God on his bed, and meditated on Him in the night watches. Asaph says, "I commune with mine own heart; I will remember the work of the Lord: I will meditate of all thy work, and talk of all thy doings." Another Psalmist exclaims, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet; I

* 1 Tim. iv. 15.

will be glad in the Lord;" and another says, "The meditation of my heart shall be of understanding."* These good men knew and felt that it was by meditation on God's truth and on God's works that the very life-blood of their piety was kept in circulation.

It needs only that we should make the experiment to satisfy us that the practice thus commended to us is intimately connected with our spiritual welfare and growth in holiness.

Meditation is that which rivets divine truth in the memory. What *is* memory but simply the having an object of knowledge, be it fact or be it doctrine, so present to the consciousness, that it rises before us whenever occasion calls for it. "When I am there," says Augustine, speaking of the treasure-house of memory, "I demand the production of whatever I will, and it forthwith comes forth; some things are longer in seeking, having to be drawn, as it were, from remoter receptacles; others come rushing in a heap, and, while something else is required, leap into view as if exclaiming, Are not we perchance what you

* Ps. i. 2; cxliii. 5; lxiii. 6; lxxvii. 12; civ. 34; xlix. 3.

want? And these with the hand of my mind I drive away from the face of my memory, till at length what I want is unveiled, and comes into view from its hidden seat."* Remembrance is simply the presentation anew to the mind of knowledge formerly present to it; but the faculty for this can be attained only by, in the first instance, letting the mind become thoroughly master of the object by resting its attention upon it. People complain of a bad memory; they should rather blame themselves for want of attention. What a man thoroughly gives his mind to he will not easily forget.

Meditation on divine things makes them really profitable to us. In the mere apprehension of truth, whether through reading or hearing, there is little or no profit. The profit begins when that which is apprehended is so pondered as to become part and parcel of the man's inner nature; just as food becomes of advantage to us when it is not only taken into the body but assimilated to it, and mixed with its substance. A man may run through a picture-gallery so as to see every

* Confess., bk. x., ch. 8.

painting it contains, and to derive from the sight a certain amount of pleasure; but he alone *profits* by such an exhibition who pauses and studies each worthy work of art, and gathers ideas from it which enrich his mind, or learns lessons from it which refine his taste, or which may guide his own efforts after excellence in art. "It is the settling of milk," says an old writer whom I have already quoted, "that makes it turn to cream, and it is the settling of truth in the mind that makes it turn to spiritual nutriment."

Meditation gives depth, seriousness, and earnestness to our religious profession and character. A profession of Christianity is easily made, and the name of Christian is easily assumed. But religion, whatever else it is, is a mode of *thought*; and hence it is only as deep and earnest thoughtfulness is bestowed upon it, that it can be developed in its higher and nobler forms. For want of this Christianity often appears in its professors as it is not desirable that it should appear. Some there are who never go beyond the elements and alphabet of spiritual truth: theirs is a superficial Christianity, a gold-leaf reli-

giousness, genuine so far as it goes, but marvellously attenuated, and not good for much, nor able to endure much. Others there are whose minds are very unstable in religious matters; who are not "grounded and settled in the faith;" who, light as the thistle-down, are blown about with every wind of doctrine; who are "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," and that simply because they never allow the truth time to take possession of their minds; a sort of feathery Christians, who look well enough when the sun shines on them, but whom the first shower is sure to rob of all their glory. Others, again, are talking Christians; full of "great swelling words of vanity," or of words which, though vain enough, are not great, and only vex the ear; men who are deft utterers of dry common-places, fluent quoters of passages, and sometimes captious and noisy disputants, but whose conversation has no "salt" in it, no richness or power or pungency in it; whose talk makes no one the better for it; ships are they without ballast, making much motion but little progress. It is for a lamentation when Christianity is presented to the

view of men under any of these forms. But without habits of earnest and patient meditation our religion is sure to become more or less superficial, flippant, and empty.

In fine, meditation animates and sustains pious affection. As we "muse the fire burns." Holy love is fed by divine contemplation. That which is suffered to fall out of sight will soon also fall out of mind; but that which is often pondered and prayed over will grow into the very tissue of the mind, and be a constant source of vitality and strength. "Trees whose fruit withereth" are those whose piety is not sustained by efforts of thought; but he "who meditates in God's law day and night shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."*

* Ps. i. 3.



II.

MORNING UTTERANCES.

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."—Ps. v. 3.

"**T**HOU shalt hear my voice." This implies two things; the one, that his voice should be uttered unto God; the other, that God would distinguish and graciously attend to what he uttered. The former is the expression of pious resolution; the latter of pious confidence.

The Psalmist felt that he had something to say unto God—something which it behoved him to say—something which it was good and pleasant for him to say. He felt that he had mercies to acknowledge, sins to confess, adoration to offer, benefits to implore. He

knew that his soul could attain to its true rest and find its sufficiency only in God. God was to him a great and present reality—the Living God, the God of the Covenant, the God of his fathers, his own God; not a mere idea or august thought, but a Being with whom he had actual and pressing relations, a Being “with whom he had to do,” and to whom it was a necessity of his soul that he should speak. Gratefully, therefore, did he avail himself of the privilege which God’s condescending grace accorded to him, and resolved that his voice should ascend unto God.

And when he uttered his voice he was assured that his voice should be heard. God hears *all* sounds. Earth’s myriad voices, heaven’s countless acclamations, the infinite harmonies of the universe, the utterances of worlds upon worlds,

“that move

In mystic dance, not without song,”

all enter without ceasing into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. But amid that inconceivable multiplicity and concourse of sounds, there is for Him no indistinctness or confusion.

Each separate sound is clear to His omniscience, and it is noted by Him according to its purport. Whether it be the utterance of rational or irrational creatures—the roar of the young lions when “they ask their meat from God,” or the carol of birds

“That, singing up to heaven’s gate,

Bear on their wings and in their notes His praise;”

or the voice of man, the lord of this lower world;—whether it be the song of praise or the cry of distress, the exulting tones of an angel’s harp or the plaintive wail of some suffering child, the shout of victory or the prisoner’s groan, the joyful thanksgiving of some grateful heart or the timid whisper of some broken and contrite spirit, the music that hails the returning prodigal, or the agonized weeping of those who refuse to be comforted because their loved ones are not: all find their place, according to their nature, in the intelligence and regards of the universal Father. When His children speak to Him, then, they may do it in the pleasing confidence that His ear is open to their speech. When they in humility and reverence lift up

their voice to Him, they may rest in the assurance that He will incline His ear unto them and hear their cry; bending down, as it were, from His lofty throne, and coming very close to them that the faintest breathing of the humblest and most burdened spirit may enter into his ear.

How marvellous is this! And at the same time, how encouraging to those who feel the need and the blessedness of speaking unto God! One wonders how the priests of Baal could persuade any to cry unto their God; or how the worshippers of the gods of Olympus ever thought it worth their while to address them in prayer. A god who might be asleep when his votary called upon him, or so engrossed in talking that he could not hear him, or on a journey, or at the chase,* so that his worshipper's petition might, like a misdirected letter, never reach its destination; or a god who might be away on a visit at the end of the earth, feasting with the Ethiopians, so that he could neither attend to his suppliants, nor save himself from being plotted against by his fellow-gods, as Homer tells us

* I Kings xviii. 27.

of his deities;* is such a god as it seems hardly worth a man's while to take the trouble of addressing in prayer. It is natural for us to pray; one's inner soul feels that some of its deepest instincts draw it to prayer; and the relief of prayer to the burdened or sorrowing spirit is inexpressible. But if we have no security that our prayers will be heard; if the chances are that the earnest and pleading cry of the suppliant may never reach the ear of his God, but may be lost—dissipated into empty air, or carried away on the wings of the wind; the instinct of prayer is suppressed, and the impulse to devotion dies away. Audience in this case is essential to utterance. How happy, then, the believer in revelation to whom is conveyed the assurance from God himself, that when His people pray to Him He will hearken unto them, when they seek Him they shall find Him. Verily, He is a God near at hand, and not afar off, a very *present* help in trouble, "whose hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear." When we entreat His favour with the whole heart, He

* Il. i. 423-425. Odys. i. 22-26

will be merciful to us, according to His word.*

Assured of God's readiness to listen to his voice, the Psalmist resolved that he would utter it *betimes* to Him. "My voice shalt thou hear *in the morning*." He determined to begin the day with God; his first and freshest thoughts should be given to Him. When all nature around him was lifting up her orison, when his own soul was conscious of the springy freshness that follows on seasonable repose, and while as yet the world with its cares, its associations, or its follies, had not thrown its spell over him; he would come and present himself to God, and open his heart to all the blessed, cheering, and conservative influences of communion with Him. He knew that what first takes hold of the mind is apt to keep hold of it, and to give a hue and character to the whole current of the thoughts and affections throughout the day. He sought, therefore, to commence the day with what would exert a benignant influence upon his soul as he went through the duties, or encountered the trials, which the day might

* Jer. xxix. 12; xxiii. 23; Ps. xlvi. 1; cxxi. 4; Is. lix. 1.

bring. Perhaps, also, he felt that at no time is the soul so susceptible of sacred impressions as in the morning; at no time is the heart's intercourse with God felt to be so serene, elevated, and comforting. "His going forth" towards his people "is prepared as the morning;" and when they arise to meet Him, and direct their prayer to Him, or sing of His mercy in the morning, a peculiar blessing comes upon their spirits; "they hear His lovingkindness;" and the light of his Fatherly countenance, descending upon them, sheds an influence over their souls, quickening and fructifying, like that of sunshine upon herbs.

The Psalmist rose up early that he might enjoy this blessing; he "prevented the dawning of the morning"* with his prayer; and many good men have deemed it important to follow his example in this. Be it observed, however, that there is no merit in mere early rising by itself. However advantageous to the bodily health this may be, and however conducive to the right ordering of the occupations of the day; its worth, in a moral point of view, depends entirely on what

* Is. v. 11; Ps. cxxvii. 2.

it is that men rise for, and on what they occupy themselves with when they are up. The Bible speaks of some who rise up early that they may follow strong drink, and of others who rise up early to eat the bread of sorrows; but such are not the only persons of whom the old homely proverb holds true, "A man may be early up, and never the nearer." "Far better," says Flavel, "is it to be found in bed sleeping than up doing nothing, or that which is worse than nothing." The great thing is to occupy the mind at once when we awake with spiritual things. If a man stir himself up that he may lay hold upon God; if he be solicitous to have his soul filled with divine and spiritual thoughts before he goes forth to the business and temptations of the world; if he be careful to secure a season of calm and composed devotion amid congenial influences as soon as he awakes, that so he may begin the day near to heaven; blessed shall be his rising up, whether it be early or late as measured by the clock; his soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; a sweet relish of heavenly enjoyment shall abide with him as the day passes on, and a fragrance, as of

"flowers on which the dew still rests," shall linger around his path, however humble or toilsome or dangerous that path may be.

And where the heart is alive to sacred associations and open to divine influences, there will be no lack of material for profitable thought suggested by the return of the morning.

What a beneficent arrangement is that by which day succeeds night, and night day, with unvarying and certain regularity! When the body is oppressed with fatigue, and the mental energies are exhausted by exercise, we instinctively seek the repose which sleep alone can bring. How wisely and graciously has the Creator provided for this by causing the light, which would irritate and discompose us, to withdraw, and the curtain of darkness to spread over us, that beneath its soothing shade we may take quiet rest and be refreshed! And not less beneficent is the arrangement by which the stated return of light is secured, so that, when our natural powers are recruited, and we are summoned to the active duties of life, we are met by that which at once facilitates the discharge of these, and cheers us to

undertake them. What a dull and miserable thing would life be if it were always night, and our eyes never felt the sweetness of beholding the sun! and, on the other hand, how irksome and fretting would it be always to be surrounded with light, and never to be invited, by the gathering shadows and coolness of evening, to seek "nature's calm restorer, balmy sleep." The commonness of these blessings tends to make us overlook their greatness; and yet it only requires a very slight experience of the want of them to teach us that it is in providing such common blessings that the wisdom and goodness of the Creator to His sensitive and intelligent creatures are most strikingly displayed.

This grateful interchange takes place regularly within a stated period. I do not know that there is any reason in the nature of things, or apart from the divine purpose and arrangement, why the earth's revolution on its axis, and the consequent alternation of light and darkness, should be fixed to a period of twenty-four hours. But this period being fixed, it is interesting and instructive to observe how all organized beings are adapted to

a cycle of this extent, during which they must take food, and sleep, and exercise, so that any great derangement of their habits in this particular is attended with injury. So regular and determined is this adaptation even in the world of vegetable life, that the great Swedish botanist, Linnæus, was able to construct a floral dial, by arranging plants so as that their opening and shutting, their resting and sleeping, should mark the lapse of time with the correctness of an artificial time-piece. The same adaptation is apparent in the animal world. Here, also, there is a regular circle round which each animal must move, so as to preserve the vigorous and healthy use of its functions. During the fixed period of twenty-four hours, each must sleep, and eat, and take exercise, under the penalty of suffering more or less of physical derangement if this law be transgressed.* It is not merely the *quantity* of food, or exercise, or rest, that comes into consideration in respect of this; an element of even greater moment than this is the regularity with which the cycle is completed within the allotted time. Were a man to say, "I

* See Whewell's *Bridgewater Treatise*, bk. i. ch. 2.

shall starve each alternate day, and on the intervening day eat double the quantity, it will come to the same thing," he would very soon find that it did *not* come to the same thing; or were he to resolve that, instead of taking all his sleep at once, he would devote a proportion of each hour to sleep, and be awake a portion of each hour in the twenty-four, he would soon find that he was rebelling against a law of the Creator, and that only suffering, if not ruin, would be the result to himself. In such an arrangement, the marks of a designing mind are not to be overlooked; and when each morning reminds us of its existence, we should feel ourselves called anew to mark its wisdom and beneficence, and lift up our voice with adoring gratitude to Him by whom it has been ordained.

Sleep is the appointed and appropriate restoration from the effects of daily toil; and usually it is not sought in vain by those whose manner of spending the day prepares them for it and entitles them to it. "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much," says the wise Preacher;* though

* Eccles. v. 12.

his fare be scanty and his couch hard, the dews of slumber shall descend upon him and refresh him from his toils. But it is not always that even to the labouring man sleep comes. Oftentimes "wearisome nights" are the lot of those from whom neither indolence nor disease has driven away sleep; and many, who have no such affliction as that which made Job exclaim, when he laid down, "When shall I arise, and the night be gone," are, nevertheless, like him, "full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day."* This reminds us that sleep is not only according to the divine arrangement, but is, in its actual enjoyment, God's gift. Even the heathen had a feeling of this; when "ambrosial slumber" came around the wearied or the vexed, they traced it to the beneficence of some favouring deity.† In like manner, but

* Job vii. 4.

† "Hid in dry foliage thus Ulysses lies,
Till Pallas poured soft slumbers on his eyes,
And golden dreams, the gift of sweet repose,
Lull'd all his cares, and banished all his woes."

Odys. v. 634-7, Pope's Translation.

See also *Odys. i. 363, etc.*

in a far higher tone, the pious Psalmist, when speaking of the privileges of God's people, places this among the rest, that "He giveth his beloved sleep."* Whilst men of the world vex and fret themselves with anxiety about their worldly affairs, they that put their trust in God can commit these affairs into his hand, and go quietly to rest, assured that He who never slumbers and never sleeps will keep them and theirs from harm. "When they lie down they shall not be afraid; yea they shall lie down and their sleep shall be sweet."† As they draw around them the curtain of repose, they can say, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for Thou, Lord, alone makest me to dwell in safety;" and when they awake in the morning they shall exclaim, "Behold my sleep has been sweet unto me."‡ The enemies of sleep are a guilty conscience, inordinate luxury, unruly passions, and worldly cares; and from all these God delivers his people, and so giveth his beloved sleep. "God," says Matthew Henry, "giveth us sleep, as he gives it to his beloved, when

* Ps. cxxvii. 2.

† Ps. iv. 8.

‡ Prov. iii. 24; Jer. xxxi. 26.

with it he gives us grace to lie down in His fear (our souls returning to Him, and reposing in Him as our rest), and when we awake to be still with Him, and to use the refreshment we have by sleep in His service. He gives His beloved sleep, quietness, and contentment of mind, a comfortable enjoyment of what is present, and a comfortable expectation of what is to come." If, then, our sleep has been serene and refreshing, let us not forget to acknowledge in this the bounty of Him whose gift this is, and who "maketh the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice."*

Nor will the devout soul forget that the goodness of God is displayed no less in our waking than in our sleeping. Sleep is the image of death; nay, is a sort of death—death's brother, as the poets, from Homer downwards, have delighted to represent it;†

* Ps. lxxv. 8.

† "Ενθ' ὑπνῷ ζύμβλητο κασιγνήτῳ θανάτῳ.

Il. xiv. 233.

See also Hesiod, *Theogon.* 756; Orphic Hymn. in *Som.*; Virgil, *Æn.* vi. 278; Shelley's *Ode to Night*; and Krummacher's exquisite parable, "Tod und Schlaf."

and it is of God's bounty that that image does not become to us the reality, and that when sleep has rendered to us its proper service, we awake again to conscious life. To God's grace also do we owe it if that awaking is to joy and peace. Many, alas! awake to suffering and to sorrow, to a consciousness of pain, and languor, and sickness, to a sense of impending calamity, or experienced grief, to poverty, and want, and misery—it may be to crime and the mad career of passionate indulgence. With many, alas! the first wish of the morning is—"Would it were evening;" and some there are to whom the morning which brings sunshine and song to all around them, is as the shadow of death.* How happy to be delivered from such a calamity! to awake fresh, and free, and untroubled! with the sound mind in the sound body, ready to go forth with alacrity to honourable and profitable occupation! Let it not be forgotten that this too is God's gift, and when it is enjoyed by us, be it ours to see to it that in the morning He shall hear our voice—the voice of grateful acknowledgment, of adoring praise.

* Job xxiv. 17.

But when we awake the day is before us. It comes to us with its varied duties, its changeful experience, its multitudinous possibilities, its manifold and perhaps severe temptations. A cloud still rests over the greater part of it which we cannot penetrate. We know not what it shall bring forth,* nay, we know not what any one of its yet uncounted hours may bring forth. The close of it may see us in totally different circumstances from those in which we commence it. Hopes may have turned to fears, or fears to hopes; evil tidings, already on the wing, may, ere night, fill our hearts with bitterness and our homes with mourning; disease may lay its hand on us and arrest us ere the day's work is done, or death may come suddenly upon us and stop our earthly work for ever; or it may be that unlooked for prosperity, or some altogether unthought of blessing may be in store for us, which ere nightfall shall throw a new lustre over our life, and make the day on which it occurred to be kept by us as "a day of feasting and gladness." Who can tell? It is all hid from our narrow view. Only He

* Proverbs xxxvii. 1.

in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways, can penetrate the cloud. To Him alone is the history of each day known ere it is transacted. But to Him it *is* all known, even to its minutest particular; and He can prepare us for all that is to happen, and guide us safely and happily through the whole. Shall we not, then, as we stand before this yet unrevealed and uncertain future commit our way unto Him? Shall we not, ere we adventure ourselves on that untried, and, it may be, perilous path, seek to encompass ourselves with the grace of His wise and watchful care? Shall we go down into that dim arena alone, when we might take with us the joy of His Presence, the guidance of His Wisdom, the protection of His Omnipotence? Who that really believes in God can hesitate as to the answer? In the morning, then, let God hear our voice—the voice of humble, earnest, confiding prayer, rising up as incense unto Him who hath graciously promised that if we “acknowledge Him in all our ways He will direct our steps.”

In the morning man ariseth and goeth forth unto his labour. Work is God's ap-

pointment for man here below. With most of us this is a necessity which we cannot avoid; but even where no such necessity compels, the wise man will lay out for himself some honourable and profitable work which he shall make it his business to do. It is thus that men live worthily and become great, by appreciating the nobleness of work, setting themselves to labour as to a sacred duty, and doing their appointed service day by day as “ever in the Great Taskmaster's eye.” It was a noble maxim of the great painter, “No day without a line,” and it was adherence to this that made him great. So should it be with all to whom God gives strength to work; as each day dawns we should look on it as a fresh opportunity for accomplishing some good, and worthy, and abiding result. And remembering that all good works come from God, and that it is only as He guides and prospers us that our labour can be successful, we should be careful each morning before we go forth to the business of the day to commit our way unto Him, that He may bless the labour of our hands and cause all that we do to prosper.

“Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.”* But there are lights sweeter than the light of day; and a sun whose radiance is infinitely more pleasant than is that of the sun in the firmament. There is the light of God’s countenance, which, lifted upon His people, puts gladness into their heart more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased.† There is His light in which we see light—the light of His revelation—that light and truth which He hath sent forth to bring men unto His holy hill and to his tabernacles.‡ There is, above all, that blessed and glorious light, the brightness of the divine glory, the light which God hath given to lighten the Gentiles; the light of the world, the Sun of Righteousness risen with healing under His wings, by whose advent “the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace.” To this divine light it behoves us day by day to come, that we may kindle our torches anew at its radiance, and be

* Eccles. xi. 7. † Ps. iv. 7. ‡ Ps. xliii. 3.

afresh gladdened by its brightness. Walking in this light all light shall be ours—the light of knowledge, the light of God’s favour, the light of life; even earth’s common sunshine shall be thereby rendered sweeter and brighter; and when days of darkness come over us, and the clouds fill the sky, this light will continue to shed its benign radiance over our spirits, and make the very darkness to be light before us. Whilst in our morning prayer we thank God for the light of day, shall we not bless Him also for this bright, this all-precious light—His own son sent to bring salvation and blessing to the fallen and miserable children of men?

Each morning as it dawns is the type and herald of that morning of mornings which is yet to dawn—the morning which is to unseal the slumbers of the tomb, the morning of a cloudless everlasting day. Our awaking from sleep each day is a sort of resurrection, and should lead us to anticipate the time when we shall awake to sleep no more. He who is the Resurrection and the Life hath said, “The hour is coming when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God,

and shall come forth.”* “Then shall He who is our life appear, and we also shall appear with Him in glory.”† Then shall be “the glorious manifestation of the sons of God,” each standing in his lot, with the light of immortality resting on his head. Oh! that glorious dawn, fit prelude of “the Sabbath of eternal rest!”‡

“ Oft I see the darksome night
To a beauteous day returning;
Oft doth sleep entomb my sight,
Yet I wake again at morning :

Bright sun return, when sleep hath spent death’s night,
That these dim eyes of mine may in thy light see light.”§

* John v. 25-27.

† Col. iii. 4.

‡ “I sing the Sabbath of eternal rest.”—William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, 1600.

§ Arthur Warwick, 1636.



III.

THE LUMINOUS GUIDE.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”—Ps. cxix. 105.

THIS psalm consists of a lengthened series of detached sentences, all of which are designed to set forth the excellences of God’s word. This is the only principle of unity the psalm possesses. Apart from this it has no greater connection of parts than a chapter in the Book of Proverbs has; but to this theme the psalm adheres very closely. The Jewish commentators have observed that there is only one verse, the 122d, in which God’s word is not named under some of its Biblical appellations; and though this is not, perhaps, strictly correct, it is very near the truth. The excellence, the preciousness, and the utility of

the word of God form the burden of the whole psalm. All calamity, all evil, all sin, are traced in it, more or less directly, to neglect of God's law and instructions; and, on the other hand, fidelity to God's word, shewing itself in believing, and hoping, and acting according to its declarations, is celebrated as the only true course for man, the only royal road to peace, purity, and safety.

A psalm like this, and it is not a solitary instance, shews how highly the word of God was prized by the saints of the former dispensation. It was to them an object of the highest reverence and the sincerest affection. They valued it more than fine gold, and they esteemed it sweeter than honey to the taste. In all the emergencies of life, and in reference to the great interests of eternity, they turned to it for instruction and counsel. They were not contented with hasty glances into it—a few verses rapidly read and as rapidly forgotten. They sat down and meditated on God's word; they sought to see wonders in God's law, and their eyes prevented the night-watches, that they might meditate therein. Hence the strength of their faith, hence the

depth of their piety, hence the richness of their experience, and hence the remarkable fact, that notwithstanding all the disadvantages arising from their possessing only part of sacred Scripture, and having to see through an imperfect medium many things which we see clearly and fully, they yet became so eminent in religious attainment that they stand forth as ensamples of faith and patience and holiness, to all succeeding ages of the church. They kindled their torch at the living fire of heaven, and therefore it burned so brightly. They dipped their cup into the pure and sparkling waters of the sanctuary, and therefore it was that they held on their course so gladly and so vigorously. They struck their roots deep into that soil which the Lord had blessed, and therefore "their branches spread, and their beauty was as the olive tree, and their smell as Lebanon."*

Do we not stand reprov'd before these saints of the old covenant? How great are our privileges compared with theirs! The canon of sacred Scripture completed—the work of redemption accomplished—promise

* Hos. xiv. 6.

and prediction turned into history—symbol and type, and shadow and emblem exchanged for reality and substance—the experience of many generations, and more extended manifestations of divine Providence to cast further light on God's word;—with these greater privileges, how much greater should be our esteem for, how much more fruitful and devout our use of, the written word of God! But is it so? Do we ever come up to their measure? Do we value God's word even as much as they did? Can we say with David here, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

The use of a lamp or lantern is to give light in the dark. When the sun shines around us, and the atmosphere is clear, we need no such helps, and think little of them. It is when the sun has set, or when we are so placed that his rays cannot reach us, that we feel the value of a lamp, especially if it shine with a clear, bright, and steady flame. Now, what a lamp is to us in the night or in darkness, the word of God is said to be to us in the journey of life: it is a lamp to the feet and a light to the path. This implies that

life is like a journey in the dark, or a sojourn in some place of gloom; and that it is the Bible which is to supply to us the illumination that is needful for us in such circumstances. This is true whether as respects life in general, or as respects particular seasons or occasions. At the best, this life is a journey in the night, and oftentimes the night becomes very dark; the moon ceases to shine; clouds obscure the stars, and a darkness that might be felt seems to wrap us round. In such circumstances what shall we do? To what shall we resort for guidance? What shall conduct our steps, or irradiate our path? The devout Psalmist holds up his Bible, and looking gratefully to Him whose word it is, he exclaims—"Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."

Whether we view man in relation to the great end of his existence as a free agent, subject to the law, and responsible to the judgment of God; or as a moral being capable of appreciating the right and finding his true felicity and dignity in choosing and following it; or as a creature capable of happiness, yet exposed to many accidents by

which he is sorely tried, and his peace is apt to be utterly disturbed : we shall alike arrive at the conclusion, that without such a guide as the Bible supplies, his path through life would indeed be dark, hopeless, disastrous. The light of nature and of reason can do little for him either in the way of helping him to solve life's most awful problems, or cheering him amid life's inevitable trials. It is at the best uncertain and unsteady, and it utterly fails at the very point where man most needs assistance. It tells us there is a God, under whose law we are placed. It proclaims to us that there is an eternal distinction between right and wrong, and asserts our obligation to follow the former and avoid the latter. It speaks to us of responsibility. It suggests to us as probable a future, an eternal existence. It forbodes a state of reward or punishment as consequent upon our conduct in the present. It proclaims to us that trial and sorrow are the lot of man here below, and bids us meekly bear, and wisely use, the discipline which we cannot escape. But having brought us thus far it leaves us there ; having told us enough to make us anxious and miserable,

but hardly anything to sustain or cheer. At this point the Bible comes to us with its precious light ; turning our night into day, and shewing us a path along which, as with our feet upon a rock, we may hold on our course safely and securely.

Think of the *certainty* of this light. In it there is no wavering, no ambiguity, no indefiniteness. It is a pure light, a clear light, a steady light, an unfailing light. It is not like a meteor that suddenly flashes across the sky and then disappears, leaving the darkness deeper than before. It is not like an ignis fatuus, the child of mist and vapour, that rises in unwholesome places and glitters only to mislead and injure. It is not like a flickering taper that burns at best with a feeble lustre, and which every breeze threatens to extinguish. It is not a murky and lurid light that casts false colours on all objects on which it falls, and leaves all but the most salient points in utter obscurity. No ; it is clear and constant as the sun, burning with a lustre that never grows feeble, and casting a radiance from which nothing is hid.

Think of its *sufficiency*. It is not only a

light to lighten the eyes, not only a lamp to throw its lustre over our path; it is also a light to the feet, discovering to us all, even the minutest, features of the path we have to tread—all its roughnesses, all its breaks and hollows, all on it that would impede our progress, or cause us to stumble if unobserved, but which observed we can avoid. Through means of it the road to heaven becomes plain; and we find out the king's highway, made by his bounty, preserved and protected by his care, a way so plain and safe that the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.* It does not, indeed, give rules for every emergency of life, minute prescriptions for all the ailments and necessities of our moral system. But it enunciates great and fruitful principles, and lays upon us the force of high and solemn motives by which our conduct should, at all times, be regulated. If the mind be thoroughly imbued with its teachings; if the memory be filled with its wise and weighty utterances; if its ideas and principles be incorporated with our mental substance, we shall seldom, if ever, be

* Is. xxxv. 8.

at a loss as to the path we ought to pursue. Submitting ourselves to its guidance as pilgrims through this night of time, our path shall be made plain for us on to the confines of eternity; and we shall cease to enjoy its lustre only when we shall cease to need it, having reached that land where there is no more night, and where doubt, and difficulty, and danger, are unknown.

And what a marvellous *vitality*, if we may so speak, there is in this light! With what unfading lustre this lamp has been shining all through the centuries as the world has been wearing out, and the heavens have been waxing old as doth a garment! What myriads on myriads it has guided safely on their way to "the city of habitation" since the day it first shot its beams from the gate of lost paradise, reaching, even then, as far as Calvary, and casting the light of hope upon the path of the hapless pair who

"Hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way,"

to essay their first day's journey through the rough places of a sin-cursed world! And

how brightly it is shining still, its glory unshorn, its splendour undimmed, its light unrivalled! Other lights have flashed and faded; other guides have offered themselves, and been followed, and the blind has led the blind into the ditch, and both have perished. But this light abides as clear and bright and beneficent as ever. Many a time has the enemy boasted that he has extinguished it; but invariably the extinction has been his, not its. Assailant after assailant has bent his energies to destroy it, "each proclaiming, just as he himself went to the bottom, that he had given the Bible its death-blow. Somehow, however, that singular book continues to flourish, to propagate itself, to speak all languages, to intermingle more and more with the literature of all civilized nations."* Nay, not only does it survive all attacks, but it is to its vitality that its opponents for the most part owe the preservation of their names among men. Who had ever heard of Celsus or Porphyry had their attacks on the Bible succeeded in destroying it? How deep the night that would by this time have enwrapped the names of Chubb,

* *The Eclipse of Faith*, p. 47, 1st ed.

and Woolston, and Morgan, and Tindal, had they succeeded as they wished in extinguishing the Bible! What is it that keeps Bolingbroke's name before the literary world? Not the productions of his sonorous pen, for these are so well-nigh forgotten that a writer of our own day has asked, Who now reads Bolingbroke? His name lives chiefly because that book lives he laboured to destroy. And so is it, too, to a great extent with Voltaire, whose sparkling wit and brilliant declamation had hardly carried his fame through the century had he not directed them against the word of God. One might have thought that by this time infidels would have learned that their cause was hopeless, and would have been led to ask, "Of what use is it to destroy the Bible so often when it lives the next minute?"* Yes; the word of the living God has that in it which makes it deathless. "All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURETH FOR EVER."†

* *Eclipse of Faith*, p. 47.

† 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.



IV.

SEEKING GOD.

"Blessed are they that seek Him with the whole heart."—Ps. cxix. 2.

THERE is in the bosoms of all men a secret *conviction* that religion is both the duty, and, in some sense or other, the privilege of man. However neglectful they may be of its obligations, however mistaken as to its nature, there is, nevertheless, an imperishable impression on their minds that they *ought* to be religious, and that if they were so, really and truly, they should certainly be happy. This conviction is to be traced, in some measure, perhaps, to the effects of early education, especially in such a country as this; but it has its root deeper than this; it springs from a source that lies *within* the soul of man; it

finds an echo in man's own conscience and heart; and it is confirmed by all the lessons of experience and the testimony of natural reason. The conviction is, in fact, a true one; and therefore, by whatever means in the first instance introduced into the mind, nothing can occur of sufficient power to eradicate it, though many things may conspire to render its influence feeble and uncertain. And such, unhappily, *is* the case wherever the conviction is based upon mere natural reason. It dwells in the mind, and ever and anon will make its existence manifest; but it wants depth and energy to be an abiding, all-subduing, ever-acting principle. In this case, besides, there is merely a conviction of the judgment, which has nothing to sustain it in the feelings of the heart. All there is hostile to it. The heart is naturally ungodly and worldly, averse from religion, and the service it requires; and unless the heart be changed so as to be captivated with the beauty and the excellence of godliness, the man's conviction in favour of religion will have no other effect upon him than that of harassing him with an inward strife, and compelling him to

exclaim, "the good that I would I do not ; and the evil that I would not that I do."

This self-contrariety and strife terminates whenever a man's heart is brought to embrace the religion of God. All then becomes right and orderly. The convictions of the judgment in favour of religion become not only stronger and deeper, but more enlightened, and consequently more commanding ; whilst the affections of the heart are drawn principally in the same direction. The whole man is thus in harmony and at peace with himself ; the equipoise of his spiritual being is restored, and the whole machine works easily and orderly. He now no longer contents himself with a cold admission that religion is a duty and a privilege ; he *feels* it to be so ; his delight is in the law of the Lord after the inward man ; and the language of his soul is, "Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart."

He who penned these words was evidently one who sincerely felt their power. They are the utterance of his heart—the language of his experience. He was not a perfect man ; far from it ; he was a man of many infirmities and

passions ; he was a man who was subject to many temptations, and who not seldom fell under their power ; but withal his heart was sincerely addicted to the service of God ; he had a true and a deep attachment to God's law ; he felt he never was so happy as when he was seeking and serving God, and therefore, notwithstanding all his weaknesses and all his aberrations, we may believe he uttered the sincere language of his heart when he said, "Blessed are they that seek Him with the whole heart." He had found it so, he had never found it otherwise, and therefore he records this as the great lesson of his life—the truth he was most anxious to impress upon the minds of others.

Now, it must be at once apparent, that this is a *right* thing—a thing fitting and becoming for man as the creature and the child of God to do. Whom or what should he seek if he seeks not God ? Is not God the author of his being, the supporter of his existence, the source of all his advantages, the giver of every good gift that he enjoys ? Is not God his Proprietor, his Ruler, his Father ? Is not God infinite in all His perfections, and in all

His resources, so that they that seek Him shall not incur any risk of exhausting His bounty, or finding the stream of His beneficence shallow or beginning to run dry? And is He not all-gracious and condescending, prone to mercy, and ready to bless, so that they that seek Him shall find Him, and find in Him all that they need? Surely, then, it becomes man to seek God—to seek Him with the whole heart! It becomes us to seek Him that we may know Him in all the glory of His perfections, and all the plenitude of His grace; to seek Him that we may gaze on His ineffable majesty, and lose ourselves amid the excessive brightness of His glory; to seek Him that we may bring our emptiness to His fulness, our poverty to His riches, our darkness to His light, that He may help us according to our need; to seek Him that we may be at one with Him, and that our souls may respond to Him as the strings of a lyre respond to the skilful touch of the master's hand. Who shall say that this is not man's chief duty, man's highest privilege, man's sweetest joy?

And yet where are the men who are thus seeking after God? Probably some who

read these lines are conscious that this is not at all the case with them. They know that God is not in any sense the object of their pursuit. They never stop amidst the world's throng to think of Him. They never feel a deep and overwhelming sense of their entire dependence upon Him. They never really commit their way to Him, or feel at all comforted by the thought that He is regulating the affairs of their earthly history. They feel no longing desire to enjoy His favour, or to dwell in His presence. Their hearts never pant after God as a thirsty soul pants for refreshing waters. They could be perfectly happy, they think, without God; nay, the assurance that God is, and that they cannot be altogether *without* Him, is to them a disturbing and painful thought. They can live without prayer, without confession, without thanksgiving. To all intents and purposes they are "without God in the world," and instead of seeking Him with their whole heart, their whole heart is set against Him, and they are hastening to separate themselves as far as may be from His image and favour.

How many are there of this class! But

happily there are many, also, of whom, through the grace of God, such things cannot be said—many who are not living in God's world as if there were no God, but to whom the thought of God is a thought of unspeakable sweetness as well as of awful sublimity, and who feel it to be good for them to draw nigh unto God, and to acknowledge Him in all their ways. Such persons cannot but seek God; and yet they know well how far short they come in this respect. They know how feeble are their most ardent aspirations after God—how often they forget Him—how easily they are turned aside from Him—to what a multitude of objects their hearts cling so as to shut Him out from the place He rightfully claims there, and how at the best it is but a divided homage, and a divided affection they lay upon His altar. I wonder if any of us in these days can honestly say, "I seek God with my whole heart." Is there nothing we love better than God? nothing we love as well as God? Is our religion chiefly valuable to us as it assimilates us to God, and brings us into fellowship with Him? Do we never feel as if we could be content

to be forgiven and delivered from hell, without being brought into conscious union and intercourse with the Most High? Is there not, after all, a vast deal of mere *selfishness* in our religion, as if the great end of redemption were the rescuing of our poor souls from misery, and not the restoration to the Master of His lost property, the restoration to the Father of His fallen and ruined child? I am afraid we have too much of the heathen notion of God as a vast Power, or a mysterious Presence, or an operative Influence, and have too little of the Christian notion of Him as a Being, as a Person, as a Father, who wants us to come nigh to Him, who would have us yield to Him our hearts, and intrust to Him all our concerns, and shelter ourselves from every harm within the spreading protection of His arms. I am afraid we are more bent upon finding what we call peace and comfort, than upon finding God; more anxious to have evidences of our own safety than to shew forth the glory of our Father who is in heaven; more filled with a sort of desire to find ourselves in heaven than to find God there. It may be worth while to look seri-

ously into this matter, each one for himself. The climax of religious excellence is not a correct creed—not an easy conscience—not a life of active zeal and purity—desirable as all these things are ;—the climax of religious excellence is this, that we are able to say with truth, “I seek God with my whole heart.” This is the religion of heaven, where they do always behold the face of their Father.

I dwell the more on this, because I cannot but believe that one reason why there is so little of earnest hearty seeking after God, on the part of His people, is that we do not sufficiently keep before us the idea that this is what above everything else it is our duty and our privilege to do. There is so much said about men seeking pardon, and seeking peace, and seeking acceptance with God, that we are apt to fall into a belief that these are in themselves the ultimate ends of our religion. But the Bible never represents them in that light, nor does it dwell upon them to such an extent as we are for the most part accustomed to do. It brings them prominently and impressively forward, for they are essential things ; but then it brings them forward rather as means

to an end—an end far transcending in importance the means by which it is to be reached ; as the first needful steps in a progress which stretches afar, and which is chiefly worthy of being entered upon because of the glorious result to which it leads. We are to seek pardon, because to an unpardoned sinner the Great King cannot speak in peace. We are to seek peace, because with a troubled spirit, and an accusing conscience, we cannot draw nigh unto God. We are to seek acceptance with Him through the blood of the cross, because until we are “accepted in the beloved,” the wrath of God lieth upon us. But having found these inestimable blessings, we are not to rest there ; there is something higher and better to which they are designed to lead us. In them we lay the foundation of the divine life, but they are not that life itself. That life is in God, and it is only as we seek Him with our whole heart that we can enjoy that life. To bring us to Himself is the crowning design of the gospel scheme. For this end our Saviour clothed Himself in the garb of humanity, and went down to the lowest places of human society that he might

teach men that there was no one so degraded and so fallen but that God could come nigh to him with His fatherly grace, and he might approach unto God, and be restored to life in Him. And for this purpose, also, has our Saviour carried with Him our nature to the throne of heaven, that he might shew us humanity on the right hand of God, and might teach us how high the everlasting Father is ready to exalt His returning child when he seeks Him with his whole heart. Does it not, then, behove all, as many as have found an introduction to God through Christ, to avail themselves heartily of this pre-eminent privilege? Ought we not, as true children, to seek to be ever near to our gracious and benevolent Father? Should we not desire His favour above our chiefest earthly joy, as better than life itself? Weaned from all inferior objects of attachment and pursuit, ought we not ever to seek the Lord with our whole heart?

Blessed are they who thus seek the Lord:—blessed, in that they find in Him an abundant and abiding portion, a portion that satisfies the intellect, pacifies the conscience, fills and

cheers the heart; a portion that changeth not nor passeth away; a portion as exhaustless as their desires and as immortal as their being:—blessed, because, seeking God, they find in Him an unerring counsellor, an infallible guide, an unchanging friend; a shepherd who maketh His sheep to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth them beside the still waters; a protector under whose wings they may trust, and who will deliver them from the snare of the fowler and the noisome pestilence; a helper on whom they may cast their every burden, and who, when flesh and heart fail, will be the strength of their heart:—blessed, in that they obtain a life-long comfort and a hope full of immortality; for this God whom they seek will be their God for ever and ever, their guide even unto death, and after death their exceeding great reward. Happy, indeed, are they that are in such a case; yea, happy are they whose God is the Lord.



V.

WAITING FOR GOD.

"My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.—Ps. cxxx. 6.

THIS is the language of the godly man, and it is language which comes from the heart. Heart-language is naturally very simple language; it seems to be such only as a very simple mind, that of a child, might use, and to mean very little. But there are usually great depths in it, and a meaning which is often exhaustless. A little child throws its arms round its parent's neck, and says, "My own mamma; my own papa!" Simple words, which the thoughtless call childish, infantile! But what a *power* is in them; what revelations of the deep, mysterious bond that links parent and child; what a depth of concen-

trated loving trustfulness they unfold; and how much have such simple, artless, innocent words of the heart to do with that mighty, though invisible, power that forms society into, not a congeries of separate atoms, but, a vast living *organism*, the individual elements of which are so incorporated that none can say to another, "I have no need of thee." Heart-language is like the stream that runs still and smooth, but in which there may be unsunned depths, and whose volume of waters has in it a force which needs only to be quickened into energy to carry all before it; or like one of those fissures in an Alpine glacier, which are so narrow that one can easily stride across them, but which go down to fathomless depths, and widen as they descend, and beneath which there is scope for the passage of a swelling torrent that is hastening to pour its waters on distant fields, and carry its refreshment to far-away homes.

The heart-language of piety, like all true heart-language, is simple, but deep. There is ever more in it than it seems to express. It is the language of the child to the heavenly Father, and it has in it the vastness and the

power of that unutterable relation. How much is there suggested in the few words before us! "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." What visions of conflict, and trial, and change, and patient endurance do they conjure up:—earth's experienced emptiness; heaven's realized fulness:—the soul turning sated from all that is seen and temporal, to seek rest and satisfaction in what is unseen and eternal:—severe trials of faith and patience:—hope deferred that has often made the heart sick:—clouds and darkness before the throne that had almost at times hid it from the view, and made all around seem dark as night;—and then the true heart rising above all this uncertainty and turmoil; fixing itself on God, the living God; feeling that all was safe with Him, "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor the shadow of turning;" and taking into its joyful embrace, for its own comfort and establishment, the full glory of a revealed and condescending God, even as they that waited for the morning took in with rejoicing eyes the glory of the sun, as his orient beams flashed on the crests of the

mountains that "were round about Jerusalem."

The Bible says much of waiting on God. The Psalter is full of references to this. Perhaps there is more about this in proportion, in the Old Testament than the New. And though this may seem strange at first sight, a little reflection will shew that it is only what might naturally be expected. The former dispensation was one of expectancy: its whole spirit was one of waiting. The Old Testament saints had not received the promise. The chief part of their religion consisted in looking for the good thing that was to come. The habit of waiting on God, therefore, was one which, as it were, came naturally to them. It was the proper expression of their religious life; their piety found scope in this especially. The duty, however, is one not confined to the times of the preparation of the gospel; it is for all times, and the cultivation of the habit has much to do with the growth of the Christian life, and the happiness and welfare of the Christian himself.

What is the true idea of the phrase "waiting upon God?" "Waiting" expresses a

state or habit which is the result of a combination of desire, expectation, and patient submission. We cannot be said to wait for anything we do not desire; at least, when the word is used strictly and properly; for when so used, "waiting" implies volition, choice, and that, of course, involves desire. Nor do we ever wait for what we do not, on some ground supposed by us to be good, expect. Nor do we wait when the object desired comes to us without in any way tasking our patience. "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience *wait* for it," says the Apostle. A reasonable expectation, and a patient endurance of unavoidable delay in the fulfilment of it, are the essential elements of all wise waiting. Horace* laughs at the rustic who sits waiting on the bank of a river till the stream should flow past. The Apostle commends the husbandman who waits with patience for the fruits of the earth. Why the difference? Because, though both exemplify patient expectation, the expectation of the latter has reason in it, while that of the former has not.

* Ep. i. 2, 242.

"Waiting on God" is thus the patient expectation of results which God has promised to secure, results which are in themselves desirable, and which God has given us reason to believe will be realized. It implies the exercise of self-control, a meek acquiescence in the divine arrangements, a confident assurance that God will do what He has promised, and shew himself in full accordance with all that He has revealed himself to be. It is opposed to impatience and self-will: impatience that kicks against providential restraints, that would hastily and immediately snatch at results, that is fretted and angered by delay; and self-will that refuses to bend to the will of God, and seeks rather what is its own than what comes from Him. From all such manifestations and tempers, the spirit of the man is far removed who can look up unto God, and truly say, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

As practically exemplifying this divine principle, we may take the case of a Christian man engaged in the business of life. Here

waiting upon God will be exhibited not in the neglect of means, or in any fanatical expectation that God will send down success apart from diligent and wise endeavours on the part of the individual to secure it, but in the pious, devout, and patient expectation of God's blessing to give effect to exertion wisely and perseveringly put forth. The pious husbandman waits upon God for the harvest which is to fill his barns; but this is after he has by tilling the ground, and casting in the seed, and clearing away the weeds, done all that he can to accomplish his desire. The pious merchant waits upon God for the success of his adventures; but this is after he has thoughtfully, providently, and wisely employed every means within his reach to secure himself against failure. And so must it be in everything; true child-like dependence upon God is a rational committing of our way unto Him, not a blind leaving of ourselves as to an unreasoning Fate.

The same principle applies to our spiritual business. There are some good men who speak as if they thought that in spiritual matters it behoves us to do nothing, but

simply wait passively until God shall be pleased to send on us what we need. To them it appears presumptuous in man to make any active effort towards salvation, or to put forth any movement of the soul for the apprehension of spiritual blessing. If they would but think of it, however, the presumption is not with those who act thus, but with those who follow the opposite course. If God says to us, "Do this and I will make it to prosper," can anything be more presumptuous than for one to say, "I will not do this, but will wait for God to do it for me?" This, instead of honouring God, is simply to rebel against Him; it is to exalt His grace in contempt of His authority, His righteousness, and His truth. On such a course it cannot be that He will look with complacency, or bestow His blessing on those who pursue it. In His word He commands us to believe in His Son that we may be saved, to save ourselves, to purify ourselves, to walk so as to please Him, to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, to grow in grace,*

* 1 John iii. 23; Acts ii. 40; James iv. 8; 1 Pet i. 22; 1 Thess. iv. 1; Phil. ii. 12; 2 Pet. iii. 18.

and such like ; and when He has laid on us these injunctions, we may rest assured that He means us to put forth the instrumentality by which these ends are to be attained, nor have we any reason to expect that He will bestow the blessing except as this instrumentality is used. When, however, we have done what He has commanded us to do, true piety teaches us to wait on Him for that grace, without which no effort of ours after spiritual attainment will succeed. And here in waiting on Him we must exemplify "the patience of hope." He may be pleased to cause us to tarry long for the blessing. Clouds may gather over the sky, and yet no drop may descend to fructify the soil. The seed we have sown may seem to have rotted and perished. We may sometimes feel as if all was lost, and our most cherished hopes had gone up as dust. But true faith and genuine piety will enable us, amidst all this, still to wait upon God ; assured that "in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

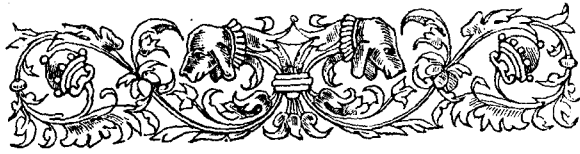
Take, again, the case of a Christian man under the discipline of affliction. This is

often severe, and being severe, it is apt to induce impatience on the part of those who are subjected to it. We want to be done with it, and if it is to bring us good we would fain have the good without the long and painful process through which it comes to us. But this is unwise ; it is seeking to possess the wealth of autumn without having to pass through the storms of winter, or the toils of spring, or the growth of summer : it is expecting to have the pure gold without the searching fire of the furnace. From such foolish impatience he who has learned to wait upon God will be delivered. He will consider that the end of discipline is development, growth, strength, purity—a bettering of the whole inner man ; and he will reflect that results of this kind are not to be produced by immediate volition, but are necessarily to be reached only through experience of a long and elaborate process. He will remember that the fruits of discipline are not a hasty growth, springing up like a mushroom to perish as quickly ; they are the precious fruits of the field for which the Great Husbandman cares and seeks, that He may lay them up in His

garner for ever, and their growth is slow and difficult because their existence is to be abiding. He that has learned to wait upon God knows also that we are very imperfect judges of what is needful in the matter of discipline; what to us may appear severe may be nothing more than what is absolutely necessary for accomplishing the result; what to our eye may present an aspect of utter confusion, may be really a well-ordered process where nothing is superfluous or out of place, and where all is under the strictest obedience to law and order. He is well assured also that if the process be severe the results are marvellous and precious; just as the mean ingredients that compose that crystal vase have, through the action of the furnace, been transformed into a material in which the very light of heaven seems to rejoice to play, and to which it yields up its inner glories hidden to all besides. Thus feeling and thinking he commits himself to God, assured that He will not afflict His people willingly, or lay on them more than they are able to bear; but in the infinitude of His love, wisdom, and power, will make all things work together for good

to those that love Him, and are the called according to His purpose.

Thus it is that true child-like waiting upon God is exemplified in the actual experience of the Christian. And is not this the proper attitude for the child of God who has learned experimentally that the Lord is gracious and faithful? Ought he not, in respect alike of the business and the discipline of life, to wait upon God, who alone can give success to creature effort, and who has promised to make all things conspire to his people's benefit? Should we not find our spiritual interests promoted rather than hindered by the events of our daily life, if we met all these in a spirit of simple dependence upon God? And should we not, in respect of the higher experiences of the divine life, be richer and more blessed if we constantly waited on God, that out of His fulness we might receive, and grace for grace? "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 on wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."



VI.

FAITH IN GOD.

“*Jesus answering said unto them, Have faith in God.*”—Mark xi. 22.

WERE one to lay down the proposition that all men live by faith, and to follow this up by the assertion that this faith is really, however unconsciously, a faith in God, probably most would think that the asserter of said doctrines wished to arrest attention by giving utterance to a startling paradox. And yet nothing can be more true than this declaration in both its parts. Man's entire life is a life of trust—a life guided not by conclusive determinations of reason, but by simple confidence and reliance—a life conversant not with certainties but with probabilities. And this faith is essentially a faith in God, seeing

it is on the wisdom and unchangeableness of God, as the Creator and Governor of the Universe, that man's reliance in the order, and utility, and truthfulness of the universe rests.

Man, we are often told, is a rational being, and his glory is that his life is regulated by knowledge and reason. This is true, and it is not true. It is true, if by reason and intelligence be understood man's entire cognoscent nature, and by knowledge everything that man holds for real and true; but it is not true if knowledge be restricted to what can be *proved* to be real and true, and reason to the faculty by which man *proves* or *rationaly authenticates* what is so held. To this latter form of the assertion, no man who has carefully studied the nature of man can give his assent. A great part of what we hold to be true we cannot prove, but must take simply on trust; and the main conduct of our lives must be directed not by reasoning but by faith. In the process of knowledge belief always precedes conviction; it is on the foundation of the former that the latter raises its superstructure. “One must believe,” says

Aristotle, "in order to learn;"* and this not only at the beginning of life, when we must, as little children, rest implicitly on the testimony of those around us, but all through life; and in every department of activity. "A man says to me," exclaims Augustine, "Let me understand that I may believe. I reply, Believe that thou mayest understand."† For by far the most important and essential of our knowledges we are indebted solely to the faculty of belief. We believe our senses, we believe in the existence of an external world, we believe in our own personal identity, we believe that every event has had a cause, we believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, we believe in moral goodness, and many other things besides. In all these instances we exercise simple trust. None of these beliefs can reason demonstrate. They are above and anterior to all reasoning. If

* δεῖ γὰρ πιστεῦειν τὸν μαθητόντα. Hence he asserts that instruction, as distinct from dialectics, communicates the principles in each branch proper to itself.—De Sophist. Elench., c. 2.

† Dicit mihi homo, intelligam ut credam. Respondeo, Crede ut intelligas.—De Verb. Apost., Sermon. 28.

we had not had them, we should not have reasoned at all; our lever would have wanted the necessary basis on which to rest.

And, in like manner, in the *business of life*, what is it but faith or trust that guides a man? A merchant, for instance, embarks his capital in a foreign speculation: On what security does he proceed? Simply on that of faith. He has no *certainty* for anything on which he rests his whole adventure. All is mere probability, and he risks so much on these probabilities simply because he has faith in them. He has faith in the elements, faith in the constancy of nature, faith in human nature; and on this he builds. Go to his counting-house, and ask him to give you mathematical demonstration or rational philosophical proof that his venture will be successful, and he will laugh in your face, or pity you for an unhappy lunatic whom too much study has made mad.

All men, then, live by faith. But is this faith a faith in God? I say it is so substantially and really, though not always consciously: substantially and really, because God, so to speak, is the substratum and authority of all

these beliefs : not always consciously, because men in their dullness, and carnality, and ungodliness, seldom trouble themselves to trace their beliefs to their ultimate basis, and are rather glad to escape the religious conclusions to which this would bring them. Thus they will say that they believe in their senses, they believe necessary principles, they believe in the stability of nature ; and so, resting contentedly in this the mere outer porch of the temple, they care not nor wish to look on the Being who sits enshrined in its inner sanctuary. But let us ask them a question or two. You believe your senses : Why ? "Because I am made to do so, and cannot do otherwise." Even so ; but *who* made you thus, and thus bound you ? And *who* guarantees to you the veracity of your nature ? You believe in the constancy of nature : Why ? "Because there is a regular and invariable sequence of cause and effect, which will not be departed from." Good ; but *why* will it not be departed from ? "Because it is evident that the order of things, and the wellbeing of sentient and intelligent creatures requires that it should not be departed from."

Good again ; but that implies the presidency and superintendence of some superior intelligence to whom these are objects of interest and importance. And so we might continue our questionings, and shew how men who believe in anything, are, at all points, brought back to God. It is because He would not deceive us, and because we implicitly know and feel this that we have faith in Nature and the things around us. In this way, then, all men have faith in God, though it is oftentimes a blind and unconscious faith. Even the atheist thus unconsciously pays his homage to the veracity of the Creator. I never heard of but one thorough-going sceptic. He was a man who, having arrived at the conclusion that nothing is to be believed, would not trust his eyesight or any of his senses, but would walk right on in the way of a carriage, or towards a precipice, or against a furious dog. But he, it is recorded, had so much faith in things after all, that he took good care to have plenty of servants always about him who were prompt to rescue him from the consequences of his own philosophic consistency, and so he managed to live ninety years

when he died.* I suppose he believed in *that*.

It is thus that the positions laid down at the outset may be made out. Man does live by faith—cannot live otherwise—would die and all his works perish, were he to attempt to do otherwise; and this faith by which he lives is ultimately and fundamentally a faith in God, because faith in an arrangement which God has made, and an appointment which He sustains, is really a faith in Him. All the laws of nature are but God's promises to man, and when man believes in them he believes in God.

What, then, does our Lord mean when he inculcates on us here faith in God, as if that were a special religious duty, and one which we are very apt to neglect? He means two things; *first*, that this faith in God, as the author of nature, and the disposer of events, should be not blind and unconscious, and, therefore without religiousness, but intelligent, and devout, and pious; and, *second*, that it should not be confined to natural arrange-

* Diogenes Laertius narrates this of Pyrrho; De Vitis etc., Philosophorum, Bk. ix., ch 3.

ments and mundane events, but should extend to the entire breadth of God's revelation of Himself, and should embrace all those interests which concern man as an accountable and immortal being. The same great principle applies to both these departments; and in this lies an advantage for us as respects the latter, which is at once the more important and the more difficult of the two. When we find that the principle by which we are to live the spiritual life is not different *in kind* from the principle by which we live our ordinary daily life in the flesh, we shall the more readily and clearly apprehend it in its spiritual bearings, and thus rightly understanding earthly things, we shall be greatly helped also to understand heavenly things.

We all understand, then, what having faith in God means in relation to temporal things: it is simply trusting that God will not deceive us—that having given us eyes to see, and ears to hear, he means us to follow the guidance of these, and guarantees to us that if we do so we shall not fail of the end designed; that having placed us under a certain order and constitution of nature, He in-

tends that we should rely on the continuity of that, and guarantees that it shall not fail us when we so rely on it. Now faith in God, in its religious aspect, is nothing different in essence from this. It is simply placing that reliance on Him *directly*, and in regard to *all* the arrangements under which He has placed us, which we exercise in Him indirectly when we trust ourselves to any of the natural arrangements which we find in ourselves or in the world around us.

Faith in God, therefore, in the general, is simply trust in Him, reliance on Him in respect of all that He has revealed to us concerning Himself and His ways to us—trust in Him for this world, and trust in Him for that which is to come—trust in Him for earth's blessings, and trust in Him for heaven's blessings—trust in Him as the God of nature, as the God of providence, and as the God of redemption. It is the same thing essentially in all; just that reliance upon God which constrains us to take Him at His word, and to go forward with the unhesitating assurance that whatever He has promised shall be fulfilled, and whatever He has appointed shall stand fast.

If any doubt remains about this being what our Lord means here by having faith in God, it may, I think, be dispelled by looking at any of those instances in the gospels where people are specially commended for their faith, or those instances in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where a long catalogue is given of those who in the Old Testament times obtained through faith a good report. If we ask what it was those persons manifested in the cases referred to, it will be found, in every case, to be just this, that they simply, and earnestly, and truly, confided in God's arrangement or promise, and acted accordingly. This was the faith of the centurion, as which the Lord had not found so great in Israel; this was the faith of the Syrophœnician woman, to whom the Lord said, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt;" this was the faith of Noah, of Abraham, and of all the long line of the elders whose faith is presented as a model for ours.* They simply held for true what God had revealed concerning Himself, regarded as a law what He had given as a

* Matt. viii. 10; xv. 28; Heb. xi.

promise, and regulated their conduct accordingly in the face of every thing that was calculated to deter, to dishearten, or to appal.

If these views be sound, we shall do well to put away from us all dark and mystical views of the nature of saving faith, which are but darkenings of counsel by words without knowledge; and no less put away from us what are often in the present day loudly commended as "clear views" on this subject. The effect of the former is like looking at a landscape through a smoked glass; the effect of the latter is like examining a painting through a tube; you see a small portion of it very distinctly, but it is at the expense of all the pleasure and all the benefit which the picture, as a whole, is fitted to convey. The wise course is to take the plain, simple, and obvious meaning of the word, and follow that; and just as when we speak of placing faith in man, or faith in our senses, or faith in the laws of nature, we mean that we go on the strong assurance that these will not deceive us; even so, when we speak of faith in God, let us understand by it the assurance we have that God will not deceive us.

If now it should be asked, On what does this rest? the answer is, It rests on the revealed character of God, and on the experience we have of His faithfulness and truth.

When we place trust in our fellow-men, on what does it rest? Simply on our knowledge of their character and our experience of them in times past. Persons wholly unknown to us we seldom or never trust. We may, indeed, on the ground of our general knowledge of human nature, and the laws that regulate men's actions, *risk* something on those we do not know, but we always feel it to be more or less of a risk. We reserve our trust, our confidence, our faith, for those we know and have tried, and the more we know them to be worthy of our trust, and the more we have tested their trustworthiness, the stronger and more influential becomes our reliance on them. It is on exactly the same ground that God would have us rest our faith in Him. He has made Himself known to us; He has revealed to us the features of His character; He has made known His acts to the children of men. We have seen His ways; He hath made His goodness to pass

before us; He has submitted His methods to our inspection. We have had large and instructive experience of Him. There is a history of God (if we may so speak) in the world and in the Church, which we may peruse, and whence we may gather knowledge concerning Him. We have thus abundant materials for judging whether He is to be confided in—whether He is worthy of, and entitled to, our implicit trust and confidence.

What is the conclusion to which we are brought? Is it not that He is all worthy of our highest, our most implicit confidence? Does He not stand forth to our view possessing every attribute that is adapted to draw out our souls in loving trustfulness towards Him? Infinitely wise, powerful, benevolent, faithful, and true, does He not possess, beyond all measure, those features of character the possession of which, even in humble measure and amidst much imperfection, constrains us to yield our confidence to our fellow-men? Is not such a being entitled to our entire and unquestioning reliance? Too good to do anything that can harm us; too wise to make the slightest mistake; too righteous to do

aught that is wrong; too potent to be baffled or turned aside; and too faithful to fail in a single assurance He has given—is He not worthy of our deepest, our heartiest, our most unwavering confidence? Is not this His regal right, to withhold which is not only an insult to His majesty, but an act of treason to His rule?*

It is the voice of reason, then, no less than that of Jesus, which says to us, "Have faith in God." If so, how irrationally, as well as impiously, do men for the most part live! How much is the life of man a life without God; that is, without any conscious recognition of God, either as the source of blessing or the director of life! How often do many of us, who would shrink from ascribing any event to chance, live practically as if things happened without purpose, rule, or end; taking things as they come, and anticipating the future with equal forgetfulness that all our times are in God's hand, and that,

* The elder Schleiermacher, in expostulating with his son on his early aberrations into rationalism, finely said, "Faith is the *regalia* of God."—Life of Schleiermacher, Eng. Tr., i. p. 45.

over the minutest events of our earthly history, His mind and hand preside. And even when we have His own word before us, and cannot get past acknowledging God to be there, how often do we insult Him by treating His promises as if they were too good to be true, His precepts too difficult to be obeyed, and His threatenings too severe to be enforced!

When one compares the forms in which the saints of old spoke of even natural phenomena, and the course of events, with the phraseology common among us in reference to such matters, one cannot help being struck with the immensely greater religiousness of the former than of the latter. "It rains," say we, as if that were all: "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it," said they; "Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof."* We speak of "the course of Nature" as if that were all: they spoke of Him who "preserveth man and beast, and upholdeth all things by the word of His power;" and with them what we call "the

* Ps. lxxv. 9, 10.

constancy of Nature" meant that all things "continue to this day according to His ordinances."* "It fell out," "it happened," says a modern historian, and thinks no more need be said; but they looked higher, and remembered Him "who changeth the times and the seasons, who removeth kings and setteth up kings; by whom kings reign and princes decree justice."† Is there no significancy in this different phraseology? Does not this different way of speaking about things indicate a different way of looking at them, and thinking of them? Is there not here an evidence that these men of the old covenant lived somehow under a deeper and more present consciousness of God than we do? that with them it was not a mere accredited dogma but a felt and realized fact that in God we live and move and have our being?

It would be easy to alter our phraseology to a conformity with theirs. But that would be a small matter, and of doubtful wisdom, seeing it is custom that has the authority in such matters. The great thing is to have

* Ps. xxxvi. 6; Heb. i. 3; Ps. cxix. 91.

† Dan. ii. 21.

the heart in constant sympathy with the divine, to see God in all things, to have a sense of Him like an atmosphere not only surrounding us but pervading us, and to go through life as Enoch did, walking with God, and finding occasion to think of God in everything that happens. There are some men who *can* live thus, some who, as it has been beautifully said, "dwell rather above the earth than upon it, alight rather than abide here, soar when they please 'into mid heaven, and at last take their flight into heaven itself."*

* Greyson's Letters, p. 70, 2d ed.



VII.

THE GOD OF SALVATION.

"He that is our God is the God of Salvation."—
Ps. lxxviii. 20.

IT is a great thing for a man to be able to say, intelligently and truly, that he has a God—the greatest thing I take it that any being endowed with a mind and a soul can say. For in all such there must be a capacity for God, and, at the same time, a necessity for God; and there can be no true felicity for such a being, no true dignity, no true repose, until that capacity has been filled, and that necessity satisfied. Man exemplifies this way conspicuously. Until he has found God, until he has realized the existence and perfections of a Being whom he may reverence,

trust to, confide in, and obey, he is restless, ill at ease, and unhappy; the great capacity of his soul is not filled, the great necessity of his nature is not satisfied. And of how many, alas! is this the case. There are "Gods many and Lords many," whom men try to believe in and reverence; but these are empty delusions—miserable mockeries which can no more satisfy man's cravings for spiritual food than the swallowing of an opiate can remove the hunger which for the moment it may serve to appease and stay. "There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him,"* and until a man has found Him, and returned to Him, and yielded himself to Him, he must continue to walk in a vain show, and vex himself in vain. Man may struggle in his pride and blindness of heart against this necessity. He may, in his desperate ignorance and ungodliness, make to himself an idol of wood or stone, and say to it, "Thou art my God;" or he may offer his worship to Mammon, and sell himself to Satan for gold; or he may make a god of his belly, and join himself to the congregation of

* 1 Cor. viii. 6.

the beasts; or he may erect an altar to reason, and try to be a god to himself. But the experiment, in every case, is fruitless; the god fails to satisfy the spirit of his worshipper; and the latter can find some transient ease to his soul only in the stupidity of oblivion or the whirl of dissipation.

It is the privilege of the followers of Jesus Christ to have God. Through Him they have found and seen the Father. Taught of Him they know God, and are known of God. By Him, though once afar off, they have been brought nigh, and have peace with God. They worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He is known to them by many noble and endearing attributes and relations. But among all there is none more precious than this, that He is their Saviour. Their glorying is in the Lord, and it is this, "He that is our God is the God of salvation."

In this character God Himself especially delights. It is that in which He would be specially known among men. The grand truth proclaimed by Him in the Gospel is, that He is "a just God and a Saviour." He

is "the God of Israel, the Holy One of Israel, the Saviour." He is "the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe." His people are taught to confide in Him for salvation. They are assured that "God will come and save them." They are commanded to wait on the Lord, and He will come and save them. They are emboldened to believe that He will hear their cry and save them. The utterance of their confidence is, "The Lord is my refuge and my Saviour." However afflicted, humbled, distressed, or sorrowful, they have faith in God as their deliverer. Their triumphant language is, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock: in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Saviour; thou savest me from violence."* And when any would rise up against them and say, "where is your God?" their prompt and joyful reply is, "He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto

* Is. xlv. 21; Ps. xliii. 3; xlv. 15; 1 Tim. iv. 10; Is. xxxv. 4; Prov. xx. 22; Ps. cxlv. 19; 2 Sam. xxii. 2, 3; 2 Sam. xxii.

God the Lord do belong the issues from death."

This title may be regarded as intended to convey the idea that God's peculiar prerogative and work is to effect deliverance for His people, and confer it upon them. He has revealed Himself as the God of power, of truth, of wisdom, and of mercy; but all these are summed up in the title now before us; for where has His power been so displayed as in effecting deliverance for His people?—where His wisdom so manifested as in devising ways of escape for them from all their calamities?—where His truth so strikingly illustrated as in that covenant of salvation which He has kept inviolate from generation to generation, and which shall never fail?—and where such a bright and touching display of His mercy as in that free grace which every act of salvation He puts forth on behalf of His people presents? Well, therefore, may those who know Him rejoice in Him under this character, and exultingly exclaim, "He that is our God is the God of salvation."

The truth of the fact here asserted concerning God has been amply demonstrated by

His whole course towards His Church and people. It has been illustrated by the temporal deliverances which He has wrought out for them, and still more by the spiritual deliverances He has secured for them.

It is the former of these that David had more particularly in his eye when he penned the words we are considering. He was thinking of God as the Great Captain and Defender of Israel from all her enemies, and he celebrates Him under this aspect as the God of deliverance, to whom belonged the issues from (or to) death—that is, either the forthputtings of power, by which the enemies of Israel are overthrown, or the opening of ways of escape for Israel when death seemed imminent.* In this character God had especially revealed Himself to the national Israel. From the first He had loaded them with benefits, and rescued them out of all their calamities. When the curtain rises upon their history, we see them, few in number, wandering to and fro seeking a settlement in that land which God had promised to Abraham, encom-

* The former is the explanation of Rosenmüller, the latter that of Hengstenberg and Ewald.

passed with enemies, and exposed to innumerable dangers by day and by night; yet out of them all the Lord delivered them, nor suffered any harm to befall them. We see them at a later period when under the iron oppression of the Egyptians. For wise and gracious purposes connected with their future destiny, God permitted them to fall under this oppression; but He was not unmindful of them whilst this sore discipline was upon them, and when the fit time came He was heard saying, "I have seen—I have seen the afflictions of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to *deliver* them."* And He did deliver them with a strong hand and with a stretched-out arm. Egypt, smitten by His judgments, relaxed her hold upon Israel, and sent His people forth a trophy to the grace and power of the God of salvation.

Another remarkable deliverance speedily followed. Pharaoh, repenting that he had let the people go, gathered all his host, and, hastening after them, overtook them at a spot where, pent up in a narrow defile, with the

* Exod. iii. 8.

Red Sea in front, their escape seemed hopeless. What could they do? A watery grave before—an impassable barrier on either side—a bloody and insulting tyrant behind, rushing down on them with his mailed squadrons:—To the eye of sense nothing but instant destruction would seem to be in store for them, or a return to the weary and wasting bondage from which they had just escaped. But to the eye of faith another vision presented itself; other hosts than those of Pharaoh were now gathering within that crowded defile; the angel of the Lord had pitched his camp between the tyrant and his prey; swords of celestial temper were flashing around the favoured host; and the prophet leader of that host, whose eye had been touched with power to penetrate beyond the region of sense, stood up and said to the trembling multitude—“Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” And great, immediate, and complete was that salvation. A passage was opened for the people through the waters of the sea; the waves rose up on either side of them as a wall of defence, and they crossed to the opposite side without the loss of one of their num-

ber, or an article of their property. But no sooner were they safe than the hand which had held up these watery walls relaxed its hold, and, nature resuming her course, the host of Pharaoh, with their monarch at their head, were engulfed in the boiling waves, and sank as lead in the mighty waters. Then Israel saw that their God was the God of salvation, and that unto God do belong the issues from death; and as the waters floated the dead bodies of their oppressors to their feet as they stood on the further shore, they lifted up their voices and sang, “The Lord is my strength and my song, and he is become my salvation. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”*

Then came their journey through the wilderness, at every stage of which they had occasion anew to mark the saving power and grace of God. Were they *hungry*? God rained down bread on them from heaven. Were they *thirsty*? He caused water to gush forth from the flinty rock, and to follow them

* Exod. xiv. ; xv. 2.

through the waste. Did they need a *guide*? He sent His angel with them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Were they assailed by enemies, and in danger from their assaults? God was their *protector*; He fought for them, and made their enemies flee before them; yea, for their sakes He "smote great nations, and slew mighty kings; Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan; and gave their land for an heritage, an heritage to Israel his people?"* Nor did He stop there. After they were settled in that pleasant and goodly heritage, He continued to be their Saviour from all their enemies, and that notwithstanding the most fearful ingratitude and wickedness on their part. Many times did He deliver them; but they provoked Him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity; nevertheless He regarded their afflictions when He heard their cry. They saw His goings, even the goings of God their King, in the sanctuary, and all that they saw taught them the unchanging lesson that He was their God, and

* Ps. cxxxv. 10, 11.

that He is to His people the God of salvation.

And as it was with the nation, as such, so was it often with individual members of it who feared and trusted in God. He was to them the Author of deliverance. The cry of the poor man went up before God, and was heard, and he was delivered out of all his afflictions. The history of the ancient Church is full of instances of God's grace to individuals who put their trust in Him; whom, when brought low, He helped; whom, when in difficulty or danger, He rescued; to whom, when in weakness, He gave strength, in sickness health, in sorrow consolation; making the darkness to be light about them, and rough places plain, and crooked things straight to them; yea, often taking occasion, from their very calamities, to visit them with especial tokens of His favour. Dull and stupid, indeed, had they been, had not his constant care, and prompt and effectual grace, taught them to say, with assured confidence and calm, quiet joy, "He that is our God is the God of salvation."

The *temporal* deliverances which God has

wrought out for His people may be viewed, and are chiefly valuable when viewed, as typical of the *spiritual* deliverances which He effects for them. Here supremely does He appear as "the God of salvation!" Here he represents Himself to us in connection with a grand remedial system, a dispensation of mercy, the great end of which, as respects man, is his recovery from sin and woe, and his restoration to the peace of God's favour and the purity of God's likeness. This scheme, in all its parts, from first to last, is of God. The covenant of redemption, on which it is based, is emphatically His covenant and His counsel—"His eternal purpose, which He hath purposed in Himself according to the counsel of His own will."* The plan of redemption is the device of His wisdom, which, foreseeing, through boundless depths of duration, man's apostacy and ruin, contrived that wondrous scheme whereby the deliverance of sinners from the just consequence of their sin becomes at once a commendation of God's love and an illustration of His righteousness. The actual accomplishment of man's salva-

* Eph. i. 9.

tion is His; He laid our help on One who is "mighty to save;" He entrusted our deliverance to One who fully accomplished the difficult, the tremendous task; He withheld not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all; and now the work is done, the price has been paid, the sacrifice has been offered, the redemption is complete. The conveying of the blessing of salvation to each individual is His; He has not only caused the gospel of His grace to be published in the world, but He has everywhere given testimony to the word of His grace by opening men's minds, that they may attend to the message by the reception of which they are to be saved, and in every case where salvation is obtained, it is the result of the immediate operation of His Holy Spirit on the heart. And the progress and consummation of salvation in the soul is His; Christ has become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him;* He who hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;† in His strength and through His grace the believer holds on, fights the good fight of

* Heb. v. 9.

† Phil. i. 6.

faith, and ultimately wins the victory; and when the great company that no man can number shall be gathered in heaven, when the redeemed out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, shall stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands, the burden of their jubilant song shall be, "Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb."*—"He who is our God is the God of salvation."

In the administration of the blessings of redemption, God manifests His grace, and presence, and power to His people in a way that fills them with wonder and gratitude. What a marvellous record would a History of Redemption be, could a book be written so as fully to answer to such a title! What a wondrous story would the full and faithful narrative of the Rise and Progress of religion in a single soul be! What manifestations of divine love, and wisdom, and power would such a history unfold! What gracious interpositions would it not record, what merciful providences, what seasonable deliverances,

* Rev. vii. 9, 10.

what hallowed visitations, what wise discipline, what watchful care, what enduring patience, what fatherly tenderness, what unwearied beneficence! Shall such a history be laid before us as one of the high privileges of the heavenly state? It is something too grand, too overwhelming for earth. We may be fit to take it in when we have reached that state where "we shall see even as we are seen, and know even as we are known." The thought is sublime; the expectation transporting. Oh! that glorious revelation! Oh! that marvellous unfolding of "the manifold wisdom of God!" Oh! that grand apocalypse of the God of Salvation!

"This is our Redeeming God!"

Ransomed hosts shall shout aloud:

"Praise, eternal praise, be given,

To the Lord of earth and heaven."



VIII.

VANITY OF MAN.

“Verily every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.”

Ps. xxxix. 5.

IN order to appreciate the force of this statement, it is not necessary that we should pause to inquire what *is* man's best estate. On this point there may be room for diversity of opinion, and different persons would give different answers to the question. Some would place the *summum bonum* of man in pleasure; some in power; some in wealth; some in knowledge; some in virtue; some in one thing, some in another; and we might unprofitably waste time, if we did not wholly lose our way, were we to stop to settle which of these judgments we should prefer. I do not, therefore, ask *what* it is

that constitutes man's best estate; enough that, be it what it may, it is here affirmed of Him in relation to it, “that verily man at his best estate is altogether vanity.” Let it be understood, however, that it is of man viewed simply in relation to this world and its affairs that the Psalmist here speaks. Of man in happy relation to God; of man as regenerated, sanctified, accepted, and under preparation for heaven; of man as immortal, and entitled through grace to spend that immortality in the presence of God, and amid the hallowed exercises of a perfectly sinless state; of man under these aspects the Psalmist never would have said that he was either altogether or at all vanity. It is of man in his frail, mortal, perishing condition, encompassed with earth's pursuits and cares, seeking his happiness in these, neglecting or despising the interests and claims of eternity, that he here speaks; and it is of man so viewed that he says that at his best estate he is altogether vanity. Let him have all that earth can furnish that is great, or pleasant, or enriching; let him be full of wealth, radiant with honours, famous for talent, genius, or learning; let a

nation's homage, or a world's dread follow the mention of his name ; let the mightiest of earth's interests hang suspended on his word or deed, still, if this be *all*, the man is at this his best and grandest estate altogether vanity.

The word "vanity," and its cognate "vain," are used in two senses in Scripture, as equivalent to *fiction* or *fictitious*, indicating something merely pretended and apparent, not real or genuine; and as equivalent to what is *useless*, *profitless*, *empty*, a thing having no worth in it, or which disappoints the expectations founded on it. In both these senses of the word, it is true that man at his best estate is altogether vanity. Apart from his immortality, his relation to God, and the enjoyment by him of God's favour, he is a mere fiction—a shadowy eidolon—an unsubstantial apparition; and at the same time a useless and profitless thing, of which it is hard to tell the meaning or the purpose. Does this seem a hard saying? Let us see whether under both these aspects the assertion of the Psalmist is not literally true.

I. Man viewed merely in his relation to

this world—merely as an intelligent animal, occupying a peculiar place on the earth's surface, or performing certain functions appropriate to his animal, rational, and social condition, is a mere apparition, a shadowy, unreal, and evanescent thing. He *seems* to be, but *is* not. He appears great, mighty, influential, operative, productive; but after all he is but a fleeting illusion, a ghost, a dream, a vapour, that passes as a tale that is told. He, as it were, but feigns or pretends to be. We look at him, and lo! he vanishes as we look. It seems but a mask that has deceived us for the moment into the belief that it was an actual living being; a hovering shadow that has cheated us into taking it for a real entity; a glittering delusion that has exploded or disappeared when most we expected to see it prove its substantiality. This has been the experience of all ages and all countries. From all quarters, and from moralists of every grade, substantially the same verdict has come, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance, they are altogether vanity."*

* Ps. lxii. 9.

When we think of it we can hardly fail to see that, in point of fact, man's earthly life is hardly worthy of the name of *being*. He is always much nearer to nonentity than to entity; to no-being than to being. At his most perfect state, he is but the development of an exceedingly minute germ. An infinitude of existence lies around him, of which he does not in the least partake. Subtract but a very little from him, and he perishes: add ever so much, and he is still far, immensely far, from touching the highest point of being. Hence Scripture speaks of him as literally a *nothing*; yea, as less than nothing, and vanity.* The saying is striking, but it is not a mere rhetorical exaggeration; of man's mortal life here it is literally true. Possessed of but a limited portion of being, whilst around him and above him there stretches an infinitude of being which he has not, he comes infinitely nearer to nothingness than to fulness of being, and therefore may truly be called a mere nothing. This is true even of man to a certain extent in his *whole* being, body, soul, and spirit; how much more of him, in relation to his

* Ps. xxxix. 5; Is. xl. 17.

mere mortal body and being, the mere husk, and shell of his higher life! The assertion may be subjected to the test of experiment. Cast that fine organization into the fire, or lay it for a brief season in the earth, and literally it will turn to nothing, at least so far as our senses can discern.

Nor is it only as compared with the infinitude of being, or the fountain of all-being, that man's existence here below appears so insignificant and vain? If we look at him in relation to the material objects or the animal existences around him here, we shall have the same conviction pressed upon us. Which of the lower animals has so many cares, troubles, infirmities, as he? Which is liable, as he is, to disease, to annoyance, to vexations, to vicissitudes? Which passes through life so burdened and so full of unhappiness as he? And what is his careworn, betoiled, enfeebled existence compared with their happy, free, careless, healthy passage through life—viewed merely as such, and apart from anything future or higher for man—but a mere vanity and shadow? Nay, let us look at the mere material existences around us—that sun, roll-

ing now as he rolled six thousand years ago, when earth emerged from chaos ; these everlasting hills that looked to the first wanderers that centuries and centuries ago set foot on our shores, just as they look to us in these later times ; the earth seared and blackened in many places by the works of those who have dwelt upon it, yet shewing no symptoms of decay ; the vast ocean flowing in its ancient channel, and lifting up its solemn music, without any indications of weakness : all things firm and lasting, fresh as when they commenced their career, and seeming to bid defiance to change or waste ; and then let us compare these with man—subject to perpetual flux and vicissitude ; passing away in successive generations like the leaves of autumn ; changing with every passing year ; not having the same tastes, habits, feelings, capacities, for any great length of time ; nay, changing the very elements of his body at certain periods, so that he lives *amidst*, or as learned physiologists tell us, *in consequence* of a perpetual death. What can we say of such an one even at his best estate, but that he is altogether vanity ?

Then let us consider the *uncertainty* of that estate itself. How often it suddenly and for ever vanishes, leaving the man that sustained it bare and beggared ; so that he who once was “the observed of all observers,” a man to whom crowds paid obsequious homage, stands stript of all his greatness, and power, and influence, an object of pity or contempt to all who behold him. This consideration seems to have been prominently before the mind of the Psalmist when he wrote these words. He was meditating on the frailty of human life, the uncertainty of earthly possessions, the changes that take place among men, and the impossibility of any man telling, when he amasses riches, to whom they shall appertain. And when he saw and pondered all this, he could not but exclaim, “Verily every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.” Under this aspect, who is there but must admit the justice of the reflection ? By what an uncertain tenure do men hold their high estate and their earthly greatness ! How soon it may all pass from them !

What a vain thing in this respect *wealth* is ! How strangely do riches often take to

themselves wings and fly away! Some unforeseen emergency, some sudden catastrophe, may plunge men in hopeless ruin. An unusually scarce or an unusually plentiful harvest may shift property from one hand to another, so that the rich man of to-day becomes the poor man of to-morrow. Or the spirit of some commercial mania, seizing the community, may spread wide and lasting confusion among capitalists, and send poverty into many honest households, whilst rogues build up mushroom fortunes to be some day swept away in turn.

What a vain thing *fame*, and *honour*, and *power* are in this respect! How suddenly the idol of to-day, before which the people have burnt incense, may be broken in pieces, and called Nehushtan by to-morrow! The man who yesterday sunned himself in the favour of royalty, may to-day find himself under a cloud, the butt of jibing tongues, and of all the multitude who were wont to lick the dust under his feet, not one now so poor as do him homage! Nay, how readily may the monarch himself be cast down from his royal estate, and the man who at sunrise was the reputed master of an empire, with wise coun-

sellors around him, and mighty armies subject to his command, may find himself at sundown a fugitive from his capital, with the wisest suggestions of his wisest counsellors proved to be utter folly, and without a soldier to strike one blow in his cause! How vain even is the fame of genius and intellect! how often is this the result of mere caprice or accident! how often it is but a mere homage to some shadow, of whom people know nothing but the name! and how often, alas! does the splendour that has drawn to it the gaze of many eyes go down amid blackness, and the brilliancy of a glorious genius become eclipsed by the shades of idiocy!

Truly it behoves not any man to glory in aught he possesses. The world and the fashion thereof passeth away. And he who is of the world, and has his holding only of it, is a partaker in its shadowy evanescence—at his best estate he is altogether vanity.

Nor must we overlook the *brevity* of this mortal life of man as another indication of its vanity. How soon it passes away, and how suddenly it is oftentimes interrupted! “Thou hast made my days as a handbreadth, and

mine age is as nothing before thee," says the Psalmist, addressing God, and mourning over the brevity of human life. At the longest life is but a narrow span, and how seldom is that longest reached! How many die in childhood! how many are cut down in early youth while as yet they have only begun to look upon life, or to plan for its duties and pleasures! How many are swept away in the full vigour and strength of their manhood, whilst their hands sustain many weighty responsibilities, and their minds are filled with projects of activity! Truly we may say with the Psalmist, "Man is like to vanity; his days are as a shadow that passeth away."* And confining our view to this life alone, and remembering how short our time is, we might be ready to ask with him in another place, "Lord, wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?"†

II. These considerations may serve to justify and illustrate the Psalmist's declaration viewed as an assertion of the unreality and unsubstantiality of man in his mortal state. But there is another sense in which

* Ps. cxliv. 4.

† Ps. lxxxix. 47.

this inspired declaration may be taken. Man is at his best estate altogether vanity, not only because he is, as it were, a delusion and a cheat, but also because, if viewed only in his earthly relations and mortal existence, he is, if not utterly *useless* and *profitless*, at least not possessed of a worth adequate to the cost and expense of his creation.

Viewing him merely under this aspect, he seems to be made in vain. He answers no fitting end. He fulfils no adequate purpose. This superior organization, this higher intelligence, this capacity for refined or elevated thought, this aspiration after spiritual conceptions and enjoyments: what is it all but a grand mistake? Do we not seem to be looking on a machine exquisitely framed and set agoing, but which performs nothing worthy of its construction? Do we not feel as if we gazed on the painful spectacle of skill, power, and immense resources, virtually thrown away and expended in vain?

Let us abstract from man's immortality, and from those pursuits and habits which fit a man for blessedness through eternity, and look for a little at any of those objects which,

apart from these, men give themselves to, and let us ask whether, supposing this was *all* man was made for, he was really worth the making? whether any of these be ends worthy of such a being as man is?

Take first the man of sensual pleasure, the man who lives but to eat and drink, and enjoy the pleasures of the body. Can we, as we contemplate such a one, refrain from the question, If this were all man was made for, has he not been made in vain? Was it worth while to make a being such as man is merely to enjoy the pleasures of sense? Was it worth while to endow him with intellect, with powers of thought, with capacities of reasoning, imagining, judging; above all, with a moral sense and a moral faculty, merely that he might be able to discover more exquisite modes of gratifying sense? The epicure devotes himself to the pleasures of the table; his supreme good lies in the agreeable titillation of the nerves spread over a few inches of his mouth; was it worth while to make him a rational and accountable being for *that*? And when one sees a man thus living, does it not seem as if one were constrained to say of him, even

when surrounded with his choicest delicacies, and when his joy is at the fullest, Surely this "man at his best estate is altogether vanity."

Or take the man who lives merely to make money. In this pursuit there is nothing intrinsically wrong; but if this were *all* men were made for, would the end justify the means?—would not man be, as regards all the nobler powers of his being, made in vain? What use is there in endowing man as he is endowed, only to enable him to scrape together a large amount of perishable dross, of which he can use for any purpose only a very small portion, and which he must soon leave to he, perhaps, knows not whom? What profit is there in all this? What would be the use of his endowments if this were all? And if a man were to dedicate his life to this, would he not spend it really in vain? Would not such an one, even at his best estate, be altogether vanity?

It may startle some if to these instances we add that of the man of literature and genius; but we venture even thus far. And here I will at once go to the highest specimens,

and test my position by the severest criterion. I will take such men as Homer, and Milton, and Shakespeare, and Michael Angelo, and Plato, and Newton, and Scaliger—men, by universal acknowledgment, first in their respective departments. The genius of these men I profoundly admire, nor would I be guilty of the folly of attempting to depreciate their claims to the homage which attainments and productions such as theirs have drawn to them from successive generations. But nevertheless I ask, If this were *all*, were these great men not made in vain? Was it worthy of God to make such towering minds only that other men might admire their works, and say over their tombs, Here lies learned dust, or the ashes of genius? I grant the worth of the *Paradise Lost*, for instance; it is a grand work of genius; it elevates and ennobles the mind that reads it; it makes one feel proud to belong to the same race with him who meditated and uttered that glorious song. But was it worth while to send such a genius as Milton into the world to do only that? Did that great mind fulfil all the purposes of its being when it had dictated that grand book?

What is the worth of elevating and pleasing minds that are themselves to perish, that a man must be made and endowed as Milton was merely to accomplish this?

Is it necessary to pursue this further? Does not the same result emerge, whatever be the department of human activity to which we direct attention? Suppose man made only for this life, abstract from his immortality and his relations to God and the spiritual world, and what is he but a splendid mistake? an exquisite piece of workmanship made in vain?

This opens up to us wherein it is that man's true worth and dignity lie; for, after all, he *is* a being of inestimable preciousness, on whom rest the regards and loving interest of God Himself. But it is not in anything connected with his mere physical nature, not in anything belonging to his mere earthly existence, that his true value, or the worthy reason of his being, is to be sought. It is in the sphere of his moral nature, and his relations to the invisible state, and his capacities for a blessed immortality, that his glory lies; and it is from this that his other endowments

and capacities derive their value. When we contemplate man under this aspect, all traces of insignificance and inadequacy disappear; every part of his nature receives a dignity and worth before unknown, and his earthly career draws to it something of the majesty of heaven and the sublimity of eternity. "The contemplation of man's mortality," says one from whom I have borrowed more than one thought in this essay, "abstractly and alone considered, clothes the soul with black, wraps it up in a gloomy darkness, makes the whole kind of human creatures seem an obscure shadow, an empty vanity. But the recalling into the thoughts a succeeding state of immortal life, clears up the day, makes him and all things appear in another hue, gives a fair account why such a creature as man was made, and therein makes the whole frame of things in this inferior world look with a comely and well-composed aspect, as the product of a wise and rational design."*

* Howe, *Vanity of Man as Mortal.*



IX.

GOD'S REGARD FOR MAN.

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"—Ps. viii. 4.

THE author of this exquisite ode had been a shepherd, and had often, doubtless, watched his flocks by night. His eye had often rested on the splendours of the starry heavens, amid the silence and solitude of "the night watches." He had felt the solemnity which the sight of the mysterious depths of these heavens, studded with innumerable gems of light, is fitted to inspire. Perhaps, with simple ignorance, he had often wondered what these glorious orbs, moving in their solitary grandeur, could be; perhaps, with profounder science than we suppose, he knew what they were, and as he gazed on

them pondered the thrilling question of a plurality of worlds. Be this as it may, he felt the mighty awe which the scene inspired, and with that piety which belonged to him, he rose from the contemplation of the sublime creation to worship Him by whose fingers these heavens with all their starry host had been framed. Lofty as these heavens were, he knew that God had set his glory above them. Splendid as was the scene which this part of creation presented, he felt that it could be nothing but a feeble reflection of the unutterable splendour of Him by whom the whole had been designed and made. And then came thoughts of his own insignificance, and that of his race. In the presence of One so powerful and so wise, how poor a creature is man!—how limited in his resources!—how feeble in his faculties!—how transient in his being! As endowed with intelligence, man may surpass in worth and dignity the material heavens with all their garniture; but in the presence of Him who made these heavens, of Him by whom the place, and form, and motions of every orb have been ordained, and by whose wisdom and power the entire framework of

creation is upheld, of what small account is man even at his best estate! On the Psalmist's mind such thoughts crowded with resistless force, and they found vent in the exclamation, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?"

There are few reflective men, we may say, but have felt similar thoughts awakened within them by similar contemplations. Nor does the progress of science tend to repress such reflections; on the contrary, the more that the telescope and the calculus reveal to us of the mysteries of the sidereal heavens, the profounder becomes our sense of the greatness of the Creator, and the more are we disposed to wonder that One so great should regard with any feelings of interest a being so insignificant as man. Still more wonderful does it appear that He should display *such* interest in man as we have every reason to believe He does. What is there in man to draw to him such regard? Who can refrain from repeating with mingled astonishment and gratitude, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that

thou visitest him?" For, insignificant as man is, God *does* visit him; God *is* mindful of him. In proof of this, we might appeal to such tokens of the divine regard as the Psalmist indicates in this Psalm—the high position assigned to man among the intelligent creatures of God, and the manifold natural endowments God has conferred upon him, making him only "a little lower than the angels, and crowning him with glory and honour." We might refer also to the wonderful providential care which God exercises over man; preserving him from innumerable sources of danger and calamity; surrounding the defenceless years of his infancy with a mysterious guard of sympathy, so that all are drawn as by an irresistible influence to seek his safety, and even the very "beasts of the field are at peace with him;" saving him from the effects of his own folly and passion; repairing the ruins which disease, or war, or crime may have effected; and ever so guiding the machinery of events that all things are made to co-operate to the furtherance of the best interests of the race. But striking and convincing as these reflections are, they yield

in importance to those which the revelations of Christianity supply as to God's care for man, and interest in his welfare. There we learn how God, of His own free grace and love, has planned for man's redemption from sin and evil; how He has, out of the riches of His goodness, paid an immeasurable price for the satisfaction of that justice by which man was held under sentence because of sin; how, having provided at a great cost the means of man's salvation, He has, by a no less marvellous and costly provision, taken care that man shall not, through his own folly and perversity, come short of the grace which has been thus prepared for him; and how, having not withheld His own Son, and His blessed Spirit from us, He continually supplies to those who accept His offered mercy, all that is needful for their ultimate restoration to the perfect image and blessedness of God. What a wondrous revelation is here of God's regard for man! O that its power were more felt by all who call themselves His children!

But in the presence of this marvellous fact, the question naturally arises, Why is it so? Whence this regard for man on the part

of God? What is there in man thus to attract the divine regard? *What* is man that God should visit him?

Man is God's creature. His fingers have framed him, no less than these heavens with all their glorious host. And as the Creator of man, God cannot but be interested in him and affectioned towards him. The Creator must ever have regard to the work of His hands. That which had its archeal type in the divine mind, and came forth as an embodied thought of God, must ever be precious in His sight. Even the meanest product of His hand bears indications of care, and skill, and power, which fill us with wonder; and what He has once cared for He must ever regard with interest, according to its worth. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission, and every shrub and flower has a history which, if it could be written, would form a marvellous record of the divine care and providence. Such constant and all-embracing watchfulness we cannot comprehend. But so it is. All things are full of God; all things are under the eye and hand of God; all things receive, according to their

place and worth, His attention and care. What wonder then if man, the noblest and most perfect of His creatures here, should draw to him in special manner and supreme degree the divine regard?

It is no uncommon thing for men to form exaggerated and pernicious views of the worth and dignity of human nature. The false and dangerous element, however, of these views is due to an overlooking of certain facts and aspects of the case, rather than to any undue estimate of the real value of man as God's creature. If man be viewed in his original constitution, if no attempt be made to deny or overlook his present fallen and sinful condition, and if it be clearly kept in mind that man as he is can reach the full development of his powers only through the operation of a gracious remedial system; it will hardly be possible to set too high an estimate on man's worth as God's creature.

Man, by his original constitution, consists of two parts, closely connected with each other, yet each very materially differing from the other, and each linking him with a separate universe. When man's body was framed

from the dust of the earth, it was complete in all its parts. Its outward form, its internal organization, were alike perfect. And yet there it lay, a senseless mass, distinguishable in no respect from the material forms by which it was surrounded, except, it may be, by the greater symmetry with which it was moulded. But when God breathed into it the breath of life, man became a living soul.* His body then rose from its congenial dust, and stood erect, and had "the port of majesty," through the energy of the spirit that was within it. By that same spirit man became allied to the invisible world—became subject to the moral government of God; and, as one who was formed in the image and likeness of God, became as in the place of God to the other inhabitants of this world, having dominion given to him "over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."†

It is in the spiritual part of man's nature that his dignity and glory lie. By virtue of it he is capable of arriving at the attainment

* Gen. ii. 7.

† Gen. i. 28.

of knowledge, virtue, godliness. In his intellectual constitution he has every capacity—conception, imagination, reasoning, memory, by which knowledge can be acquired and retained. Added to this is his emotional nature, by which he is prompted to action, excited to the use of his faculties, made the procurer of his own success, and the promoter of his own happiness. Above all are his moral powers, by which he has the sense of right and wrong, the disposition to approve the former and condemn the latter, and the capacity of avoiding the one and following the other! In these endowments lie man's crowning dignity, and from them comes his real worth. It is by these that he is raised incalculably above all other creatures in this part of God's universe. It is by these that he has a power, dignity, and worth which his material frame never could have given him. How feeble is that frame! How easily disordered, how speedily destroyed! But, though he be as a worm, as a vapour, as a moth, in this respect, in another he is mightier than the whole universe around him. Through the influence of physical causes his life may

be taken from him ; but as Pascal has finely said, " Though the world should oppress and crush him with ruin, he would still be more noble than that by which he fell ; because he would be sensible of his fate, while the universe would be insensible of its victory."* In this respect there is something divine in man—a spark of that primæval godlikeness in which he was created, lingering still unquenched amid the corruption and confusion of his fallen state. And will not God have regard to *that* ?

But there is something in man that gives him a worth even beyond that which his intelligence by itself confers. He is not only endowed with a reasonable soul, but that soul is endowed with *immortality*. By the decree of the Almighty, the soul, once gifted with being, can never cease to be. When ages after ages have rolled their round, these souls of ours shall be as far from any term to their existence as they are now. When the records of history are closed ; when nature has ceased her circling course ; when the sun has gone down for ever ; when the stars have

* *Pensées*, Part i., Art. 4, sec. 6.

been extinguished in the vault of heaven ; when time, having lost its measures, shall no longer be reckoned ; and when a new order of things shall have come to supplant the present ; the soul of every human being shall be found existing still, by these mighty changes unaltered, because superior to them all. Who can think of this without wonder ? Who can fail to see the mighty worth of that which is thus endowed ; which knows no height to which it may not soar, no province of the universe which it is not competent to survey, and no lapse of duration through which it shall not continue to be !

There is a strange majesty and impressiveness in the idea of immortality. Mere perpetuity is of itself a quality that commands our reverence. That which has existed for centuries, even though it is to perish at last, cannot be an object of indifference to us. We speak of " the everlasting hills " as if the very rocks were venerable because of their age. The streamlet that flows past our dwelling, though nameless and small, becomes something grand and impressive when we think that " man may come and man may go, but

it flows on for ever." Comets fill us with a sense of awe, not so much because of their rarity as because, in their mysterious wanderings, they seem like explorers of the infinite, like travellers through eternity. The stamp of immortality would give value to anything. What dignity, then, must belong to man, into whose soul God has breathed an existence which absolutely shall never end.

But there is something beyond even this that draws to man the divine regard. Nobly gifted, and dowered with immortality, man is, in his present state, *guilty* and *miserable*. If there be majesty here, it is majesty in ruins. Over that soul, so mighty in its power, so far-stretching in its aims, so endless in its duration, there has passed a wasting and withering blight. When sin entered man's soul, man became the slave of the Prince of Darkness; and the more noble his original powers the more degrading is his slavery; the loftier his original destiny, the more melancholy is his altered state. His intellect, under this baneful influence, becomes too often the apologist of his lusts. His tastes are away from virtue, from holiness, from God. His onward course

is one of growing depravity and deepening ungodliness; and his prospect for futurity is nothing better than that of unending exclusion from the favour of God, with the bitter endurance of his wrath and curse, during an eternity of being amid the thickening darkness of the abodes of woe. When we think of what man originally was, and of what, but for his sin, he would still have been, and contrast that with his present condition and prospects as a sinner, we seem to stand before the ruins of some splendid temple, whose broken pillars, and dishonoured altars, and dismantled walls, proclaim at once its present desolation and its former glory.*

It is startling to think what a strange importance guilt or misery gives to a man. An individual may have lived unnoticed and unknown in the privacy of domestic life for years; but let him commit some crime, some transgression of law, and immediately he becomes an object of the deepest solicitude and interest, who must be sought out at whatever cost; be arraigned, and judged, and punished; and about whose history the whole

* Comp. Howe, *Living Temple*, part II., ch. iv., sec. 10.

community becomes full of interested curiosity. Or an individual may pass us in the street every day for years without attracting our attention ; but let him pass some day evidently bowed down with sorrow, or suffering from pain, and immediately our apathy ceases, and we acknowledge in him an object that commands our regard. What wonder, then, that the deep guilt and commensurate misery of man as a sinner should invest him with an importance beyond even that which his godlike nature and immortality of existence confer ?

To a mere creature contemplating man's fallen condition, his case might seem painfully hopeless. Can this defaced and ruined pile, he might ask, be repaired ? Shall its floor be cleared of that unseemly rubbish, its pillars be again set up, its walls be rebuilt, its altar purified ? Shall the smoke of incense again rise and fill this place with its grateful fragrance ? Shall the hymns of adoration and of praise again swell triumphant music within these desolated walls ? Can the old glories of this now ruined fane return ? And with a sad and pensive sense of the impossibility of such an achievement, he might turn away, if haply the spectacle

might be forgotten. But He who made man at first is able to restore him, and He wills him to be restored. For that ruin there is reparation, for that degraded spirit there is hope, for that lost soul there is redemption. God, touched with a sense of man's misery, and concerned for the vindication of his own honour and government, has come forth to bring this wretchedness, and disorder, and evil to an end. The very guilt and wretchedness which seemed to shut man out from God have drawn to man in stronger and more marvellous expression God's regard to him. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed him."

Such is God's regard for man. Can we contemplate it without admiration, gratitude, and praise ? Was ever mercy and goodness like this ? If to rebuild a fallen temple ; if to redeem a captive slave ; if to deliver a nation from the oppressor, be deeds which justly command the highest admiration, what shall we say of the redemption of a thinking, an accountable, an immortal spirit, from the ruin of depravity, the captivity of sin, and the oppression of hell ? Can any result exceed this in importance ? Would that the power

of such a manifestation of God were felt as it ought to be by all who call themselves His children!

And what an idea all this is calculated to give us of the preciousness of the soul's redemption! We are accustomed to consider the mere fact that any subject is known to occupy the thoughts and purposes of a great mind as an evidence of the importance of that subject. What shall we say then of the importance of that which thus occupies the mind and the counsel of the infinite God? Whatever He gives His mind to must be of incalculable value. He needs not to relax His mind by the occasional pursuit of trifles. He is not subject to caprice, such as often leads the greatest of human intellects to bestow their regards on objects unworthy of their care; nor can He ever be imposed upon by specious appearances, which seem to invest objects with an importance they do not really possess. He sees things absolutely as they are, estimates them with unerring judgment, and deals with them strictly according to their worth. When, then, we behold Him caring for the redemption of our souls, planning for

this, making this the end of a grand scheme of world-wide operation, and Himself providing the price by which the end was to be secured: what a view does it give us of the worth and preciousness of human souls! But this is not all. We are accustomed to measure the moral value of any act by the degree of difficulty which the agent may have had in performing it. An act of virtue easily performed commands far less of our approbation than one which is performed in the face of much opposition. A man who follows his conscience, though he knows that loss and suffering, and even death, may be the consequence, proves himself to us to be a worthier man than one who follows his conscience along some flowery path of customary or popular virtue. A man who is meek and gentle because he has learned to subdue a naturally haughty and impetuous temper, is universally recognized as evincing far higher moral power and worth than the man who is meek and gentle merely because it is his nature so to be. The moral greatness of a faith like that of Abraham is to be measured most of all by what it overcame, when, at the command of

God, he went out from kindred and country, and journeyed into a strange land, not knowing whither he went; or when, in his reverent fear of God and deep trust in Him, he withheld not his son, his only son, when called to give him up to God. God applies this criterion to us in judging of our claims to be His servants; and He teaches us to apply the same to Him in reference to His interposition on our behalf, for our salvation. In the way of this stood many obstacles—man's ingratitude and unworthiness, the claims of the divine law which man had broken, the rights of sinless creatures, the fearful price at which alone man's redemption could be purchased, and other obstacles besides, such as are not within the range of our knowledge. But all this was overcome. Such was God's estimate of the peerless value of man's soul, that He could not let it perish; and when no less a price would suffice, He withheld not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all. At what an incalculable value must God estimate man's soul!

It is in connection with these considerations that man's real worth and dignity may

be estimated. This is the true and only safe way of looking at the subject. It is easy to get into poetic raptures about the excellence of human nature; easy to declaim in praise of man's goodness and greatness; easy to weave fine dreamy speculations about the inherent capacity and coming development of humanity. But all this is baseless and misleading if taken apart from what the Bible tells us of man's ruin by sin and his redemption through Christ. It is in Jesus alone that our nature finds its completion and its crown; and it is through Him alone that our race can be raised to real dignity and beauty; through Him alone that its original capacity for what is good and precious can be developed and satisfied. "We are complete in Him."* Apart from Him our nature seems like a fine and complicated mechanism, for which no adequate end is provided, and which is under no adequate directing power. It is from Him alone that we receive that restoration of our moral and mental equipoise, that readjustment of our inner nature, and that due direction of our faculties, on which our

* Coloss. ii. 10.

true dignity and supreme felicity depend. It is not in respect of deliverance from condemnation alone, but in respect of the entire culture, development, and perfection of our nature, that his own saying is true, "Apart from me ye can do nothing."*

* *χωρὶς ἐμοῦ* (not *without*, but *apart from* me), John xv. 5.



X.

GOD THE LIGHT OF HIS PEOPLE.

"The Lord is a Sun."—Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

THE imagination is a faculty which may be abused, and often unhappily is abused, so as to become the minister of sin. But in itself it is one of God's precious gifts to man, and as such is capable of becoming the instrument not only of the purest enjoyment, but also of spiritual improvement and edification. By means of it vividness may be given to our conceptions of goodness and purity; by it we may be helped to apprehend what is spiritual and divine; by it "that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard" may be so presented as that the mind shall be able to conceive it; and by it we may be so helped to visions of the heavenly and the holy that we

shall have foretastes even here below of that blessed state which is kept in reserve for them that love God.

The Bible appeals largely and frequently to the imagination of its readers ; and among other ends for which it does this, one of the chief is that of lifting up our minds to just views of God in His relation to His creatures. What God is in Himself, in the absolute perfection of His nature, we cannot be told ; all that we can learn of Him is relative and analogical ; but this is much, and this the Bible largely supplies. In order to this the sacred writers make use of similitudes drawn from the objects with which we are familiar, in order that, by conceiving these in the mind, and tracing the analogy between these and God, we may arrive at something that shall be felt by us to be a real and true, though necessarily inadequate thought of Him. We are thus conducted from the familiar to the new, from the known to the unknown, from the sensible to the spiritual ; and thus the imagination becomes to us as an eye wherewith we may see God.

Of these figurative or analogical represent

tations of God, the Psalmist presents one in the words before us. "The Lord," says he, "is a sun," a comparison as instructive as it is striking.

Where men, through the influence of ungodliness and sin, have resorted to the worship of nature, it is in the sun that they have found the most obvious and most appropriate symbol of God. Not liking to retain God Himself in their thoughts, or unable from the prevalence of carnal affections to realize the idea of an invisible spiritual Being, they have fixed upon that object which, of all others, most powerfully strikes the senses, and which seems by its qualities and influence to present the most, and the most striking, analogies to the Deity, and first have made it the representative of God, and then by degrees revered it as itself God. Thus it was that idolatry crept into the world ; and when God sought to preserve His people from this it was needful to forbid them to take anything in the heaven above no less than in the earth beneath, as supplying a likeness or representation of God. Good men in all ages saw the danger of this, and shrank from it with abhorrence. "If,"

says Job,* "I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand [*i.e.*, as an act of adoration to those luminaries†], this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I should have denied the God that is above." But though such an identification of the sun with God, or substitution of the sun for God, was abhorred by all good men, and was to be shunned by all as a gross and ruinous sin, it still remained lawful to borrow from the gorgeous luminary of day figures and similitudes whereby the better to convey to the mind just and impressive thoughts of God. It is in this way that the Psalmist comes to speak here of God as a sun. Between God in His

* Ch. xxxi. 26-28.

† "In adoration we carry the right hand to the lips, and move our whole body." Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, Bk. xxviii. c. 2. Though this was a common mode of worship, it does not seem to have been held as what a truly devout man would content himself with, for Lucian says, "The Indians when they rise up in the morning pray to the sun, not like us who think a kissing of the hand a sufficient act of worship." *De Saltatione*, 17.

relations to His people, and the sun in relation to the world, there are many and striking analogies, the consideration of which may tend to lift up our hearts to Him in a true and vital piety.

As the sun to the world, so God to His people, *is the source of light.*

We may not know *what* light is—I believe men of science have not yet quite settled this question among themselves—but all men who are in possession of their senses know *when* it is light, and know that the presence or absence of natural light is determined by the presence or absence of the sun. We say, therefore, without hesitation, that the sun is the source of light to the world. He is "the Lord of Day," and we rest in the assurance that, as long the sun endureth, day will come to disperse the gloom of night, and that light, which is sweet to us, shall be poured around our path, gushing from its "sovrain vital lamp."

Now, as the sun is to the natural world in this respect, so is God to the soul. He is for us the great source and fountain of all spiritual light. As He is Himself light,

“And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity,”

even so is He “the Father of lights,” from whom all radiance comes, and by the reflection of whose brightness all created lights shine. From Him we have the light of *reason*: “There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.” From Him we have the light of *conscience*: He has given to us the faculty of discerning good from evil, the power of preferring the one to the other, and the tendency to view the one with complacency and approbation, but the other with censure and remorse. And that reason and conscience might themselves be rightly guided, He hath given to us the light of *divine knowledge*, making known to us the truth concerning ourselves—where we are and how we are, what we are and what we ought to be—and the truth concerning our relation to Him and the mighty interests which hang suspended on these relations—how we may regain His forfeited favour, be renewed in His image, and enabled to walk so as to please Him.

How precious is such knowledge! With-

out it how poor we are, and how unworthily we needs must live! Suppose a prince, the heir of a mighty empire, brought up in the dark: he might be clothed in the meanest apparel, his person might be stained with filth, his whole appearance might be one of squalor and meanness, and all around him might bespeak only what was degrading and miserable; and yet, immersed in darkness, he could see nothing of this, and so, unconscious of his degradation, might fancy himself surrounded by all that befitted his high dignity and splendid prospects. Or if he came to have some sense of the unworthy position he was compelled to sustain, how in that deep darkness was he to find means to escape from it? Nay, it might even be that a way of escape lay open before him, and yet, because he saw it not, he might remain deploring his condition, and feeling as if his case was hopeless. Even so is it with us in that prison-house in which sin has bound us. Our degradation is deep, but we see it not; or if some sense of it forces itself upon us, we seem so utterly without means or hope of escape that we are ready to court oblivion of our misery as

the wisest expedient we can adopt. It is only when light from God comes to us that our true condition as sinners is fully realized by us, or the hope of escape enters our soul. We then see how fearful is our ruin, how miserable our state, how gloomy our prospects. But with this God shews us also the way of deliverance; the door of our prison-house thrown open; the charge that was against us annulled; the forfeiture that had been passed upon us rescinded; and a pathway to light, glory, honour, and immortality opened freely before us. Oh! how "marvellous" is the light into which we are then brought! and how gloriously does God then reveal Himself to our hearts as a sun!

As the sun to the world, so God to His people, is *a source of vitality and fruitfulness.*

The sun is the great vivifying power in the material world. By the action of his beams vegetation is quickened and matured; the blade grows up into the stalk, and flower and fruit come to consummate and crown the product. In the absence of light and heat from the sun, plants languish and perish; they struggle into form without beauty, and,

after a brief season of sickly existence, they droop their heads and die. Even so is it with the soul if it be estranged from God, or at a distance from him. It is only as we are quickened by Him that we spiritually live. Apart from Him, all is lifeless and fruitless within us. No symptoms of healthy growth, no putting forth of leaf, or bud, or blossom, no promise of fruit in us, if He withhold from us His life-giving influence! But let God shine on the soul, and all is quickened and renewed; under His benignant beams the feeblest plant shall live and thrive; souls that seemed dead and withered, touched by His radiance, become vigorous and fruitful; and they that appeared fit only to be cast aside as worthless, visited by His grace, "revive as the corn, and grow as the vine, and their scent is as the wine of Lebanon."*

As the sun to the world, so God to His people, is *a source of joy and comfort.*

Light is ever linked in the mind with the idea of felicity and festivity. Physically, "light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun." A pathway irradiated with

* Hos. xiv. 7.

sunshine, a room into which the daylight pours, are associated in our imaginations with ideas of cheerfulness and exhilaration, while sadness, depression, despair, find a congenial sphere and fitting emblem in darkness; and from this light has become among all nations the appropriate and established emblem of gladness. Now as light to the world in this respect, so is it with the soul in relation to God. Where His light shines into the heart all is joy and peace. Where He enters into the soul it is as the coming of the morning, and His voice is to His children as the morning song. Without Him the soul is dark, and cold, and cheerless; covered with clouds; immersed in fogs; shivering amid mist. Surround a man with all that is brightest, and fairest, and most attractive in earth; if God be not there what will it all come to? To what can we liken such an one but to a man loaded with ornaments, enrobed in purple, and decked with jewels, but whose days are spent in darkness, and over whose spirit hangs a ceaseless hopeless gloom? On the other hand, let the soul be bereft of all that earth can give that is pleasant, or fair, or good;

let poverty, bereavement, calamity, disease, cast their mingled ingredients into the bitterest cup that ever mortal was doomed to drink; let the man be like Job, whose calamity was heavier than the sand of the sea, and within whom were the arrows of the Almighty, the poison whereof drank up his spirit;* yet if God be there, the man's heart will be like the dwellings of Goshen amid the darkness and wailing of Egypt; the sunshine of a sweet peace and holy resignation shall diffuse itself over his spirit; the joy of the Lord shall be his strength; and through the grim darkness of earth's sorrow shall come the beamings of divine love, the pledges and the harbingers of the heavenly glory.

How truly blessed are those to whom God thus graciously manifests Himself as their sun! It is their privilege to say, "the Lord is my light and my salvation;"† and come what will on earth, they have the joyful assurance that the light in which they walk is an "everlasting light," which even the darkness of the grave shall not be able to quench, or so much as cause to become dim. Would that all who

* Job. vi. 2, 3.

† Ps. xxvii. 1.

enjoy this marvellous privilege remembered as they ought that it behoves them to walk as children of the light, and that as God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, it is only as men walk in the light that they can have fellowship with Him!* Happy they who, by a consistent career of piety, purity, and devotedness, hold on their course as "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Theirs is a pathway of progressive brightness; and at last they pass, as by an insensible transition, into the midst of that glory which they have long been beholding from a distance, and to the likeness of which they have been gradually changed.

* Eph. v. 8 ; 1 John i. 5-7.



XI.

GOD THE PROTECTOR OF HIS
PEOPLE.

"He is our help and our shield."—Ps. xxxiii. 20.

IN seeking to reach our hearts by conveying truth to us under striking and instructive similitudes, the sacred writers draw, not only from the phenomena of nature, and from natural relations, but also from the usages of the people among whom they dwelt, and even from the objects of common life with which they were familiar. Of the similitudes which they drew from such sources, some are so homely that we are at first almost startled to find them used for the purpose of expressing divine truths. But the sacred writers sought above all things to be understood, and to speak to men's business and bosoms; and whenever

they found any comparison or mode of expression that was adapted to this, they at once laid hold of it, indifferent as to what might be thought of them by the critics or the lovers of fine writing. Their language, however, though homely, is never such as to offend a pure taste, and we have only to endeavour to place ourselves in the condition of the parties they first addressed, to perceive the truthfulness, and feel the force of all their allusions.

To our modern notions it may at first sight appear almost irreverent, and incompatible with right ideas of God, to speak of Him as a buckler or shield to His people. And yet the Bible often uses this metaphor in reference to the Almighty, so that we may be sure it was fitted in an eminent degree to convey just and striking thoughts of God to the minds of those to whom it was first written. Nor does it require more than an effort to translate ourselves into their place, and surround ourselves with their circumstances, to feel the suitableness of such an image, and receive the impressions it is designed to convey. To the ancient warrior his shield was a most

important, indeed an indispensable part of his accoutrements for the field. Without it he was without any adequate defence from the assault of the enemy; whereas if he had a sufficient shield, and knew how to use it skilfully, he might, in those days of hand warfare, protect himself from serious injury. Without this, however, his case was hopeless. A man without a shield was the butt of every arrow and a mark for every spear; and as, in those days, they always fought with heavy weapons, and were ignorant of the modern science of fencing, which enables a combatant to make his weapon itself a shield, a man without a shield could hardly escape being very soon hewn down and destroyed by the sword, even should he escape the missiles which led on to the close fighting. Hence to have a shield came to signify to be protected in the season of danger, and as it was not unusual in battle, when one soldier lost his shield and was in danger of being killed, for another to step before him and afford him the shelter of his buckler, the phrase "to be a shield to one," came to signify the affording to that one protection, so as to

enable him to escape danger, suffering, or defeat.

It is in accordance with this that the sacred writers, nay, God himself in His word, use the phraseology now under notice. Accommodating Himself to the modes of thinking common among men, God condescends to represent Himself as going with His people into the conflict through which they have to pass, fighting by their side, and in the moment of their sore peril and extremity casting over them the protection of his shield, and thereby warding off from them the blow of the enemy. The general purport of the similitude is that God is the defender and protector of His people; that whatever be their dangers they have Him on their side—whatever their weakness, they have Him for their defence.

The felt appropriateness of the similitude has led to its frequent use in Sacred Scripture. Thus God said to Abraham, when called to dwell in the midst of enemies, "Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward."* So also Moses, in his dying song, congratulates Israel thus, "Happy

* Gen. xv. 1.

art thou, O Israel; who is like thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help and the sword of thine excellency."* And in the book of Psalms the same figure occurs so frequently that it is impossible here to refer to the instances. The language of the Christian has in all ages been this, "Behold, O God, our shield; our soul waiteth for the Lord; He is our help and our shield."†

The relation which God thus sustains to His people is a gracious and encouraging one. It is *gracious*, inasmuch as it is exclusively of His own sovereign love that He thus condescends to watch over and protect and defend His people. We have no claim upon Him for such bounty and blessing. The dangers to which we are exposed we have brought on ourselves by our sins. If we are assailed by temptation, if we are sunk in despondency, if we are languid and lifeless, and ready to fall, is not the fault with ourselves? Does it not lie in our want of faith, in our allowing the world to take too deep a hold upon us, in our indulging the flesh with its affections and lusts, in our giving place to

* Deut. xxxiii. 29. † Ps. lxxxiv. 9; xxxiii. 20.

the devil instead of resisting him, in our impetuous self-confidence or our foolish faintings of heart? And as all these are *blameworthy* causes, might not God justly leave us to the consequence of our sin or folly, saying, "They have fallen by their own iniquity, I will let them alone?" Ah! how sad were our fate if God were to deal with us thus! How soon we should fall irrecoverably and for ever! How cruelly would the adversary triumph over us, and tread us under foot! But blessed be God, it is not so. Self-caused as all our troubles are, blameworthy as are all our causes of danger, our gracious God takes too deep an interest in our welfare to allow us to perish. "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine."* In the thick of the conflict, amidst the noise of the battle, in the moment of extremity, when the enemy seems about to strike the last decisive blow, the Lord will hear the affrighted cry of His servant, and "the prey shall be taken from the mighty, and the prey of the terrible one

* Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19.

delivered."* Between us and the glittering sword of the destroyer shall suddenly interpose the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler, and safe behind its shelter we shall but hear the ring of the interrupted stroke. "The Lord is a shield."

And oh! how *encouraging* this ought to be to us! Apart from the protection of God, the position of the believer is sufficiently alarming. A traveller through the territories of a fell and watchful enemy; burdened with many anxieties, obligations, and cares; encompassed with weakness; blinded by ignorance; easily duped and easily seduced; with but little experience, little skill, and little strength—how precarious and perilous is the path he has to pursue! For mere flesh and blood, the enterprise in which the believer is embarked is utterly hopeless. But here is his encouragement—God is his shield, his protector, and his help; and with such aid, "with a helper so divine," what occasion has he to fear, or faint, or be disheartened? Let him think of God's *power*—that power which made and sustains this vast and varied uni-

* Is. xlix. 24.

verse; that power for which nothing is too great, nothing too minute; that power before which Satan trembles and all hell shakes; that power which commands and wields the resources of the universe, and which, if need be, can bid into existence new and before unheard-of energies;—that power is on his side. Let him think of God's *wisdom*—that wisdom to which all things are known, by which all are arranged, which permits evil for the securing of good, which uses the efforts of the wicked for the securing of the triumph of righteousness, which overrules all the designs and doings of Satan for the overwhelming of his own cause, and which can make "all things work together for good;"—that wisdom is on his side. Let him think of God's *love*—how He "loveth His own that are in the world;" how His is an everlasting and unchanging love; how he afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men; how he feels for His people in all their sorrow, perplexity, and strife; how He so identifies Himself with them that their triumph becomes His, as their defeat would have been His; how He is so bound to them, and they to

Him, that nothing can separate them from His love, "neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature;"*—this love, too, is on his side. Surely with all this to sustain him the believer may confidently say, "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. The Lord is my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"†

"Let troubles rise and terrors frown,
And days of darkness fall;
Through Him all dangers we'll defy,
And more than conquer all."

Oh! for more of this holy courage, this sacred manliness! What reproaches we should avoid, what disgraces we should escape, what difficulties we should surmount, what triumphs we should achieve, were we but brave and valorous up to the measure which the belief of God's

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

† Ps. liv. 4; lvi. 4; xxvii. 1.

promised aid and protection in the Christian warfare is fitted to supply. Alas! in this, as in other respects, it is our unbelief that is our greatest foe. We are not straitened in God; we are straitened in ourselves. Would that we were enlarged so as to take in the full measure of strength and blessing that our gracious Father is ready to bestow on us!

“Come, gracious Lord, descend and dwell
By faith and love in every heart;
Then shall we know, and taste, and feel,
The joys that cannot be exprest.
Come, fill our hearts with inward love,
Make our enlarged souls possess,
And learn the height, and breadth, and length,
Of thine unmeasurable grace.”*

* Watts.



XII.

THE ETERNAL ONE.

“*From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God.*”
—Ps. xc. 2

IT is very interesting to observe, amidst the changeableness of men, the almost constant uniformity of humanity in all ages, in all climates, and under all varieties of outward circumstances. Not only is the physical constitution of mankind the same in all its great features, mental and corporeal; not only are the moral characteristics and social tendencies of the race marked by a dominant similarity; not only are the great laws which determine the habits, speech, tastes, and methods of men, uniform throughout the race; but “one *event* happeneth unto all;” the experience of one age or people is substantially

that of others; the feelings which sway the bosoms of one community are found actuating those of others; the joys and sorrows, the smiles and tears of one age have their counterpart in those of the next; and even the forms in which men express their emotions sustain slender alteration from lapse of time or difference of nation. Hence compositions which truly embody human experience and feelings find a response in the bosoms of the inhabitants even of distant countries, and awaken kindred sympathies in those whom ages may separate from their original authors. The science of antiquity we may slight; but never its history. The philosophy of remote peoples we may find uninteresting or unintelligible; but never their poetry. The speculations of Plato or Aristotle may be incomprehensible to us, or destitute of any charm for us; but Homer's descriptions and natural touches are as fresh and potent to us as they could be to the men in whose ears they were first uttered; and we yield ourselves to the wit of Aristophanes or the pathos of Euripides as readily as did the Athenians of the age of Pericles. "One touch of nature

makes the whole world kin;" and the writer who can truly lay his finger on the heart-strings of those around him is sure to find a response in the hearts of all besides.

This ninetieth psalm is one of the oldest poems in the world. It bears to be the composition of Moses, and when we compare it with the specimens of Moses' poetry scattered through the Pentateuch, the similarity between them is such as strongly to favour the tradition which ascribes it to his pen. This poem, then, goes back beyond the age of the most ancient product of profane literature extant. It has the antiquity, not of centuries merely, but of milleniums. And yet how fresh it is! how natural the sentiments it utters! how entirely in sympathy with our own souls are its statements! Every one feels that its words come home to his own heart, that they accord with his own experience, and that they suggest trains of thought and feeling with which he can fully sympathise. Who has not, like the author of this psalm, marked and mourned over the transitoriness and uncertainty of all things here below! Who has not been constrained to feel that man's life is but a dream,

but as a flower that blooms in the morning and is cut down and withers ere evening! Who has not felt how fearfully the solemnity of man's mortality is enhanced by the fact that all his iniquities have been in God's sight, even his secret sins in the light of God's countenance; and that when he dies it is to pass into the immediate presence of that God, to give account of the deeds done in the body! And when thoughts such as these press upon the mind, and throw their saddening shadow over the spirit, what can be more comforting, strengthening, elevating, than the thought that God is the dwelling-place of his people; that He remains unaffected by all the changes that beset and trouble them; and that whilst all our earthly hopes may fade, and all our earthly joys may perish, and all our earthly supports may fail, and darkness and death may enfold us and ours, He, the God of our life, abides for ever, to satisfy us with his mercy, to gladden us by his presence, to cause his beauty to appear unto us, to establish the work of our hands upon us, and, when our work on earth is done, to be, through eternity, our satisfying portion and reward?

The fact of the *divine eternity* is one of those facts which, when announced to us, we can very well receive and believe; but which no process of explanation can ever help us fully to comprehend. There is nothing in our past experience, or in that of our race, with which we can compare it; and the most sustained efforts of imagination fail to carry us to a point from which, even in fancy, we could behold it. All things within the range of our cognisance are things which have begun to be, and which sooner or later must cease to be. Even we ourselves, though endowed with immortality, furnish no materials for helping our thoughts to grasp what eternity means; for though we may fancy that we can conceive of never-ending existence, though we may sometimes indulge the fond thought that we can lay hold on the mighty fact that these spirits of ours are to exist for ever, after all it is but a mere vague conception which we seize, amounting at the utmost to a negation of the possibility of our ceasing to be, but never reaching a positive assurance of what it is always to be. And if we cannot adequately conceive of an eternity to come, to which we

ourselves are destined, how can we conceive of an eternity that is past, and which stretches away from the point at which man began to be, into the dark and mysterious solitudes of infinitude? If afloat upon the stream of existence we feel ourselves unable to follow out that stream in its ceaseless flow, so as to realize the thoughts of a voyage on it which is never to terminate; how it is possible for us to go back and trace upwards the current of an existence which springs from no source, of which there is positively no fountain head, and which *has* rolled, as it will *continue* to roll, *for ever?* Were there a point in the divine existence at which that existence commenced, we might hope some time to reach it, though it were millions on millions of centuries back; but the thought that there is *no* such point; that after going back millions on millions of ages we have not approximated by any measurable degree nearer to that of which we are in search; that when we have soared to the dizzy heights, and beyond which no created wing can carry us, we are still as far as ever from discovering any summit, and must just fold our wings and rest contented in our

ignorance;—it is this which makes us feel how utterly the divine eternity is beyond our grasp, and how absolutely impossible it is for us in this respect to find out God. No; “He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. Clouds and darkness are round about him. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.”* It is not thine, O man, who art but of yesterday, to comprehend Him who is “from everlasting to everlasting God.”

The sacred writers make no attempt to bring the subject of the Divine Eternity under our comprehension. But to the fact itself they make frequent, solemn, and emphatic reference. The first verse of the Bible affirms that when the universe began to be, it was at God's bidding it existed, thereby plainly intimating, that before creation commenced He possessed an uncreated, that is, eternal existence. “I lift my hands to heaven,” says God himself to the Israelites, “and say, I live for ever.” † The name by which he reveals

* 1 Tim. vi. 16; Ps. xcvi. 2; xviii. 11.

† Deut. xxxii. 40.

himself is Jehovah—the being whose nature and essential property it is to be. He is the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity; the King Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible; who alone hath immortality.* In the 102d Psalm, the pious writer, like Moses in that before us, contrasts the divine eternity with man's frailty, and thence derives assurance and comfort to his own mind under sorrow. "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old as doth a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."† And much in the same terms is the language of Isaiah?—"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

* Isa. lvii. 15; 1 Tim. i. 17; vi. 16.

† Ps. ciii. 25-28.

power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."* Incomprehensible, then, as is this fact in the divine nature, it is so clearly and fully revealed to us that we cannot but receive it as among the sure truths of God.

The eternity which we are taught to ascribe to God is *absolute*. When the Bible represents Him as existing for ever, it does not mean that God continues to exist as we do, by successive lapses of being. With Him there is no succession—no change. He never advances, never learns anything, never acquires experience. As the apostle strikingly expresses it, He is the "King of the ages,"† of whose changeless eternity time is but the afflux, and with whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." "Thy years," exclaims the devout bishop of Hippo, "neither go nor come; . . . thy years stand together since they do stand; nor are those that go excluded by those that

* Is. xl. 28, 29.

† Βασιλεὺς τῶν αἰώνων. 1 Tim. i. 17. So Augustine calls God, "Operator omnium temporum." Confess. xi. 15.

come, for they pass not away. Thy years are one day; and thy day is not every day but to-day, because thy to-day yields not to to-morrow, nor succeeds to yesterday. Thy to-day is eternity. Thou hast made all times, and before all times thou art.* Infinitude has no measures—eternity no lapse. With the Infinite and Eternal there is no past, no future. He fills an immutable *present*—an eternal *now*. And whilst all things else begin, and grow, and fade, “He is from everlasting to everlasting God.”

The eternity of God is by us incomprehensible; is the revelation of this, then, of no profit to us? By no means. We are so constituted that we may use as a regulative fact what we cannot comprehend as a speculative truth;† and such is the use we have to make

* Confess. xi. 16. In a similar strain a modern writer, who in many respects is mentally akin to Augustine, says, “The eternity of God means ever his almighty eternity, that is, that which conditions, not only all time’s things, but time itself in God.”—Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre*, i. sec. 67.

† See the valuable work of Dr. Mansel, entitled, “The Limits of Religious Thought.” Lond., 1860.

of the Bible revelations concerning God, all of which pass our knowledge. His eternity we cannot realize in itself, but the fact that He is eternal we can so realize as to be influenced by it in the practical management of ourselves as his creatures and subjects.

Nothing is so well calculated to awaken and strengthen in us high views of God himself as the frequent meditation of his eternal power and godhead. In this world everything is so subject to change, decay, and death, that a Being superior to any or to all of these naturally fills us with respect and awe. Could such an one actually come before us, with what feelings should we regard him! He might be weak, wicked, mischievous. But the mere fact that decay could not overcome him, that death could not touch him, that time could not waste him, would insensibly draw to him our interest and our awe. Or suppose an angel who had lived centuries before man was made, were to visit our world; he might be one of the humblest of these ministering spirits; and he might have lived in some distant spot of God’s vast empire, so as to have nothing to tell us about what it most concerns us to know,

but the mere fact that his existence remounted to a point compared with which the date of man's existence on earth seemed but of yesterday, would be sufficient to invest him with attributes of majesty and wonderfulness, which would fix on him universal regard and reverence. But what are such cases as these compared with Him who from everlasting to everlasting is God? When no creature existed He was. He looked forth from His own unfathomable eternity "over the immeasurable vast" of possible things, and out of the greatness of his own immensity, filled the desolate void with myriads on myriads of beings. And whilst with them all is dependence and change, and with many of them there is decay and death, He sits unchanged and unchangeable; "the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness nor the shadow of turning." Empires may rise and fall; worlds may be created and extinguished; suns may vanish from the sky, swept with their attendant worlds into the fathomless abyss; there may be war in heaven itself, and angels, principalities, and powers, may be hurled from their first estate into darkness and bondage; but

of these mighty changes, as none transpires without his knowledge, so none can reach Him or shake for a moment one pillar of his throne. With what awe and reverent worship does it become us to think of Him who is thus glorious in the majesty of an endless being!

The eternity of God may be profitably contemplated by us further, because it affords the most perfect security for the permanency of his government. The government of God is the reign of goodness, holiness, justice, and truth; and by the predominance of these, the happiness of all his intelligent creatures is settled and confirmed.

But how could we rest secure in this happiness, had we not perfect assurance of the eternity and unchangeableness of God? Is there anything we could trust to, anything we could count on, were we not sure of this? We are surrounded by many wise and benevolent arrangements in the physical world: could we avail ourselves, with any comfort of these, were we ignorant of, or uncertain about, this fact? We speak of the laws of nature. The phrase is a convenient one, and there is no fault to be found with it, provided it be kept

in mind that all we mean thereby is, that such and such is the general order, according to which natural processes and events proceed. We shall err egregiously if we think of natural laws as something possessing a substantive or necessary existence. There is no such thing in nature as a necessary law. Natural law is simply the order according to which God works. Determined at first by His will, all such laws depend on His will. He can suspend, change, or abolish any one of them as He pleases; and were He mutable or transient, a moment's thought will suffice to suggest to us what a wretched state of uncertainty the whole physical universe would be placed in. And as it is in the physical, so is it in the moral world. God is the moral governor of the universe. He has placed His intelligent creatures under a moral law, of which He is the administrator, and under which He dispenses punishment or reward to them, according to their deeds. But were He not eternal and immutable, all this might go for nothing. Caprice, or circumstances, or fate, might lead to the utmost confusion in His moral empire; to the punishment of the good

and the blessing of the wicked; or after a final arrangement apparently had been come to, some disastrous occurrence might interrupt it, and spread perplexity, anarchy, and war, over the intelligent universe. Blessed be his name! this can never be. The foundation of God standeth sure. The hands that hold the sceptre of the universe never grow weary. The balance of eternal justice never trembles. The ordinances of heaven are never changed. When all the devices of the wicked shall have come to nought; when all the plans and projects of human wisdom shall have been found failures; when "the effacing fingers of decay" have swept over the works and monuments of men; when man himself has passed from earth; and when the heavens and earth have been consumed with fervent heat; the counsel of the Eternal still shall stand, and the grand distinctions between right and wrong, by which the moral administration of His empire has been guided, shall be found abiding firm, alike vindicating the glory of the lawgiver, and securing the felicity of those who have been obedient to His law.

With joyful confidence, then, may we rest

in the stability and perpetuity of the divine government. Because God changeth not, we, the poor frail children of men, are not consumed. Many are our goings out and our comings in, as we pass on our way to the eternal world ; but He, the unchanging one, keepeth them all. Submissive to His authority, trusting in his grace, rejoicing in his power, we may with unfaltering hearts pursue our course, however dark the sky above us, or however rough and perilous the path beneath our feet. To His people, the eternity of God secures the fulfilment of all his promises ; the continual presence and support of His grace ; and the unfailing protection of His power. It is to this they have ever looked for comfort in perplexity and sorrow. Moses, as he composed this psalm, saw all dying around him ; of the people that came with him out of Egypt none remained ; they had been carried away as with a flood ; and as he remembered how he had outlived them all, a pensive shadow came over his soul ; but he remembered the eternity of God, and was comforted. David, through manifold trials, was once cast down and afflicted ; deep called to deep ; all the waves

and billows of affliction had gone over him ; but he trusted in God, and as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so did his soul pant after God the living God. The Israelites in Babylon hung their harps upon the willows, as they sat by the rivers of their exile ; they ate ashes with their bread, and mingled their drink with weeping ; but they remembered that God was the same, and that His years should have no end ; and so they were assured that “ the children of His servants should continue, and their seed should be established before Him.” * In all ages it has been the same ; earthly friends perish and pass away ; but the righteous have learned to look up to God, and say, “ Of thy years there is no end ; the Lord liveth ; blessed be my Rock.” Trouble, sorrow, temptation, conflict, assail them ; but amid all they hear God saying to them, “ I, even I, am He that comforteth thee ; who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die ? ” and so they gather fresh strength, and gird themselves afresh for the struggle, from the thought that whilst that which assails and troubles them is transient, He who comforts and sustains, and cheers them is the Eternal

* Psalm cii, 27, 28

One. Unspeakable is the comfort thus secured to the children of God. All things around them are full of change, and they themselves change with the changing times; but God, their Saviour, changeth not; He abideth for ever, their helper and friend, who will never leave them nor forsake them, as long as life's journey lasts; and who, when all earth's toils, and sorrows, and conflicts, are over, will receive them into "everlasting habitations," to find in His eternity the source and security of their own.

But what if this Eternal One should be displeased with us and prove our foe? Ah! "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the *living* God." An earthly adversary may forget, or change, or die. But to have God for our adversary is to be exposed to the vengeance of one whose eye never overlooks, whose threatening is never retracted, whose law never changes, whose power never ceases, and whose wrath, when once it rests on the transgressor, rests on him for ever! Happy they who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel, and who, united to Christ the living Saviour, have been by Him delivered from the wrath to come!



XIII.

GOD'S WORK AND MAN'S WORK.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children; and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hand upon us; yea the work of our hands establish thou it."—Ps. xc. 16, 17.

IT is probable that Moses composed this psalm towards the close of his earthly career, and that the "work" to which he here more particularly refers, is the work of the Israelites in undertaking the subjugation and occupation of the promised land. His language, however, has no special or exclusive reference to that work; it is quite general, and may, without impropriety, be adopted by God's people in reference to any good work in which they are engaged, and especially in

reference to the whole of that religious life-work which God has given them to do. As Moses continually exhorted the Israelites so to act as that God would bless them in all the work of their hands, so here he implores of God, in reference to that work, that this blessing may really descend on it; that God would let His work *appear* unto His servants, and His glory unto their children. In a similar spirit, and with like earnestness, may the people of God, in all ages, in reference to that work which as His people they have to do, ask of Him, "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children, and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish Thou the works of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."

These words, thus viewed, suggest certain truths bearing on the spiritual life, which it may be profitable to state and illustrate.

I. We are here reminded that, *in spiritual operations, God has His work, and we have ours.* In the event here more particularly referred to, the entrance of the Israelites into

Canaan, God had a part to perform, and the Israelites had a part to perform; and accordingly, the Psalmist distinguishes the former in his address to Jehovah as "Thy work," and the latter as "the work of our hands." In other parts of Scripture we find the same distinction signalized. Thus, the prophet says to Zion, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come;" but he immediately adds, "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee,"* where we have the church looking up, as it were, to God, and catching on her His light and glory, and then reflecting that on the world at large. So, in another place, the same prophet says, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion;" but he has already, only a few verses before, addressed the very same words to God, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord."† And in the New Testament we have such a passage as this, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure;"‡ where not only is

* Is. lx. 1 † Is. lii. 1; li. 9.

‡ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

God's work set forth as coincident with our work in the matter of salvation, but is assigned as a reason and an encouragement for the strenuous and faithful performance of what it falls to us to do in this matter.

In regard, then, to everything which it behoves the people of God to engage in, there is this distinction to be kept in view, these two facts to be remembered—that God has His work and we have ours. We need not enter here into any theory or explanation of this. We need not stop to ask which comes first in the order of nature or of time, God's work or ours; nor to inquire whether God carries on His work independently of us, or synergistically with us, or as consequent upon ours. These are questions which we may safely for the present leave untouched. It is enough that we keep in mind the fact, as a fact in divine revelation, that in spiritual matters, whether they relate to individuals or to the cause of God generally on the earth, God has His work and we have ours.

II. *As we cannot do God's work, God will not do ours.* God's work is the carrying out

of His own eternal purpose, the fulfilment or bringing to pass of His own hidden secret decree. He works, as the apostle says, "of His own good pleasure," taking counsel of none, asking aid of none, giving account to none. It is on this account that the psalmist prays here that God would make His work to *appear*. Being His work, it is already as good as done. What He purposes to do He does. "None can stay His hand from working, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" "His counsel shall stand, and He shall do His pleasure."* But until this mighty working comes forth upon the platform of actuality, it is for us hidden and unknown. We cannot tell what method the divine purpose may follow, what shape the divine work may assume. Of this only are we sure, that it will be worthy of God, and be to the pious and expectant soul a revelation of God. And hence the Psalmist here identifies God's work with His *glory*— "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children." The glory of God is His *apparent* excellency—the outflashing of His inner majesty through the

* Dan. iv. 35; Is. xlvi. 10.

clouds and darkness that surround His throne ; and this is effected only by His work becoming apparent. It is God's working that causes His glory to be seen by His intelligent creatures. That glory is in itself inaccessible to creature perception. No man hath seen it or can see it. God must come forth and clothe His inherent perfection in fact, before we can perceive it ; and when He does so His glory *appears* to the observant and pious soul. It is thus that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth forth His handiworks." It is thus that "He shall appear in His glory when He shall build up Sion."* And it is thus that, whenever He comes forth to work for His people or His cause, He makes His glory to appear to them and to their children.

In God's work, then, all is spontaneous and sovereign. It is for us a manifestation of God—a great lesson of the infinite and unsearchable, which it behoves us to mark with adoring and docile minds. We cannot perform it—we cannot help to perform it. We are alike impotent to help or to hinder it.

* Ps. xix. 1 ; cii. 16.

But we have something more to do than simply to look on, whilst God works. We have our own work to do in relation to the same end and objects for which God is pleased to work. That work is "the work of our hands." Does this imply that our part is merely that of *instrumentality*, or does it imply that ours is the *office of toil and labour* ? The phrase may convey either of these meanings, and we need not curiously to inquire which is to be preferred, for both are true.

Our department in this great work is that of *instrumentality* in working. We have simply to put forth our hands and do what God, the Supreme Master, has planned and prescribed. We are merely His servants, and we can neither ask Him a reason for what He enjoins to be done, nor with safety or honour neglect to do it. He must tell us what we are to do, and He must also prescribe to us how we are to do it. It was thus He dealt with the Israelites in reference to the conquest of Canaan. It was no device of theirs to conquer and possess that land. The idea did not originate with Abraham, or any of his progenitors, or any of his successors. It came

forth as a spontaneous announcement and command of God. He gave Canaan to them. He commanded them to go up and possess that land; and He also laid upon them the conditions under which they were to occupy it, and the course they were to follow in order to secure it. In all these respects they were but his servants, and their work was wholly ministerial and instrumental. And so it is in every department of the work of God; we must do it as a work given to us by God, and as He prescribes. It is so in the matter of our *personal salvation*. The plan of saving sinners is not of man's device, and in availing ourselves of that plan we must follow the divine prescription; we must work out our own salvation in God's way, or we shall not be saved at all; we must travel to the heavenly Canaan by the path which God points out, or we shall never reach it. It is so also in the matter of *saving the world*; we must seek to convert men in God's way, or we shall never convert them at all. We *have* a part to perform here, but it is the part of servants and not of masters.

Our work is one of *toil and labour*.

With God there is no toil, no effort, no exertion. "He speaks, and it is done; He commandeth, and it standeth fast."* He has but to draw aside the curtain that conceals His purposes, and instantly His work appears, and His glory flashes forth. It is otherwise with man. He is a being of progress, who advances to completion by degrees, and as the result of effort. For him, therefore, there is a lot of toil; his work must be the work of his hands. So it was with the Israelites. They had to secure Canaan by hard toil, by perilous conflict, and by slow degrees. It is the same in spiritual matters. The salvation of the soul is no instantaneous event; it is in most cases a slow process, requiring much watchfulness, much work, and much trial. The character that is to stand the test of eternity has to be welded with many a stroke, and tempered in many a furnace, ere it is fit to "shine refulgent in a heaven serene." The extension of the church is slow work. The conquering of the world for Christ is slow work. A building of wood, hay, stubble may be soon run up, but it will not stand

* Ps. xxxiii. 9.

the fire; if our building is to be of solid materials, if it is to incorporate gold, silver, and precious stones, we must take time to it, and lay our account with anxiety and toil before we can raise it.

Now, this work of ours God will not do for us. He has prescribed it to us as a master, and He will, as a master, require us to perform it. If we are idle, or fickle, or self-indulgent, or inconstant, the work will not be done. If the Israelites had not obeyed God's command, and gone up and wrested Canaan from its former possessors by sheer toil and struggle, Canaan never would have been theirs. On one occasion Moses forgot this, and instead of directing the people what to do so as to escape from danger, he began to pray to God to do their work for them; but what was God's answer? "Why cried thou unto me? Speak to the people that they go forward."* If men have a journey to go, and have feet to carry them to their destination, what folly would it be to lie down and ask God to carry them thither? It is the same in spiritual things. If men want to know the

* Exod. xiv. 15.

way of salvation, they must attend to and accept the message of the gospel. If they want to be saved, they must do as God commands them—believe on His Son. If they want to advance in the divine life, they must run in the paths of His commandments—must mortify the flesh, with its affections and lusts—must put on Christ—must follow after peace and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. If they want to escape danger and defeat, they must be sober, and vigilant, and patient, and courageous, and full of hope to the end. In short, they must do what God requires of them faithfully and perseveringly. God will not do it for them. He will in no way recognize their indolence or negligence, by exempting them from the painful consequences of these. As He will not ask us to do His work, so He will not do ours.

III. *Though we cannot do God's work, we may pray to God in reference to it.* We may ask Him to make it appear—to hasten it—to perform it for our comfort and our blessing. On this point what can we say beyond simply

reminding Christian people of the fact that it is by means of their prayers that the work of God is to be made to appear. He will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them ; He will accomplish His work in answer to pious, earnest, and persevering prayer ; nor have we any reason to believe that, either as respects individuals or as respects the world at large, He will do His work, except in answer to His people's prayers. We cannot explain this. We cannot tell why it should be so, or how it is that our prayers are followed by divine performances. But we need not the less, on that account, joyfully accept the fact, as revealed to us by God. Some, indeed, have tried to discourage from all prayer on this ground. They have said, What possible effect can our prayers have on the Omnipotent? and hence they have concluded that it is vain for us to pray. Now, the meaning of this objection is simply that they cannot tell *how* our prayers can affect the divine actings; in other words, that they cannot *trace* the connection between our act in prayer and God's act in answering it. This is all that the objection to prayer implied in such a

question can mean. Well, we would reply, what of that? This is not peculiar to prayer; it is true of everything that is the result of any other thing. People are apt to imagine that what they are familiar with as a phenomenon they understand as a speculation. But no man understands *causation*. In the commonest instances of cause and effect there is a mystery which none can penetrate; for no man can tell *how* it is that the cause produces the effect. If a match be applied to a quantity of gunpowder, for instance, there is an explosion, and we say the explosion has been caused by the application of the match. True; the one followed instantly on the other; but why it did so, or what is the connection between the two, we cannot tell. All we know in any such case is, that the fact which we call the effect follows invariably the fact which we call the cause. Now, we know as much as this in regard to the connection between prayer and its effect. We know, from God's word, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." We know by experience that the utterance of prayer is followed by a divinely-produced result; and knowing this,

we know as much about the connection between prayer and its answer, as we know of the connection between any cause and its effect. Some philosophers, indeed, of no mean name, have concluded that all causation is to be resolved into an exercise of the divine agency, that power resides alone with God, and that the virtue which connects the cause with the effect is immediately and directly from Him.* If this be so, the objection to prayer we have been considering utterly vanishes. If by moving a piece of matter in a certain way I can evoke an exercise of the divine power, surely much more may I gain this by speaking directly to God, and asking Him to put forth such an exercise of His power. But on this we need not insist, especially as the opinion is far from being adopted, even by philosophers who are piously ready to acknowledge the being and constant providence of God in the world. We have answer sufficient to the cavil we have been considering, in the fact that all causation is to us a mystery; so that until men can resolve this

* Malebranche, *Recherche de la Verité*, Bk. 3. Stewart on the Active and Moral Powers, I., p. 364.

mystery, and tell us how, in any case, one thing causes another, it is a mere impertinence in them to object to our praying, because we cannot tell how our asking can lead to God's acting.

IV. *Though God will not do our work for us, we may and must ask Him for help to enable us to do it.* From Him all wisdom and all strength come; and unless He favour our undertaking, guide our working, and establish our work, no success can crown our efforts. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."* From Him "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed;" and without Him nothing is wise, or strong, or good. To Him, therefore, must we look for strength and grace to do that work which He has laid upon us. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us;"† and if we but earnestly ask Him, He will give us aid, up to the full measure of our

* Ps. cxxvii. 1.

† Eph. iii. 20.

need. Impotent in ourselves, we are strong in Him; and we have only to "lay hold of His strength," to find ourselves sufficient for all the work and all the warfare to which we may be called.

The practical conclusion to which these thoughts lead us is simply this, that in the great business of our lives, as God's servants, we are to work as if all depended on ourselves, and to pray to God that He would work with us and in us, as if all were to be done by Him, apart from any activity of ours. The union of these two is the secret of all spiritual success. "Prayer and pains," the missionary Eliot was wont to say, "Prayer and pains will accomplish anything."



XIV.

THE LAW OF PROGRESS.

"The Lord said, There yet remaineth very much land to be possessed."—Josh. xiii. 1.

WHEN God gave Israel possession of the promised land, it was by slow degrees, and through a process which was difficult and protracted, that they made it their own. He might have done otherwise had He pleased. He might have driven out the former inhabitants of the land at once; He might have swept them with the besom of destruction as in a moment; or He might have caused the fear and the dread of His chosen people so to come over them that they should have fled before them, and left the land open for their possession. But it was not so that God saw meet to fulfil His

promise to Israel. He commanded them to go up and possess the land by gradually expelling those who already occupied it, and who were prepared to contest every inch of soil before they gave it up. Slowly, but steadily, they were to advance until the whole promised possession was wrested from the grasp of their enemies and appropriated to themselves. Neither by the elations of success, nor under the depression of fatigue and protracted expectation, were they to suffer themselves to relax their efforts so long as there remained any land to be possessed.

In thus dealing with the Israelites, God proceeded on a principle widely and generally exemplified in the dealings of the Omniscient with His intelligent creatures here below. In every department of His government we find that it is by growth, progress, and repeated action that great results are obtained. We perceive this law at work in the *material* creation around us. In the vegetable world we see perfection reached by slow degrees and by means of a continuous process: the oak of the forest was once a tender sapling which bent to every breeze; but inch by inch, and

year by year, it *grew*, until it now bids defiance to the storm of the elements. We see this law at work in the animal world: the man of herculean strength and gigantic stature was awhile ago but a feeble babe, fit only to be fondled and nursed; but by the gradual development of his muscular energies, in obedience to the great law of growth, he has through a series of years advanced to his present bulk, and strength, and prowess. We see this law at work in the world of *mind*: the intellect of Bacon, or the intellect of Newton, was once that of a mere wondering boy, opening to the comprehension of the most common-place phenomena, finding material for admiration and delight in the most trivial occurrences, and sorely perplexed, even with painful effort, to master the first elements of learning; but with slow and steady expansion, by the simple process of successively taking and occupying point after point in the domain of thought, these minds grew until the one could give law to philosophy, and the other could bring philosophy down from the starry firmament obedient to the laws which had been made for her. It is

thus that all through creation we may find a principle at work analogous to that exemplified in God's dealings with the Israelites in the case before us. Everywhere we find incessant progress constituting the rule by which His works reach their full maturity. Nothing becomes perfect all at once, or by sudden bounds. Growth, expansion, development, characterize all things within the range of our observation. And the further we extend our gaze, and the more boldly we generalize from observed phenomena, the more pressing becomes the conviction that neither in regard to the yet undeveloped resources of Omnipotence, nor in regard to our own knowledge of what Omnipotence has already unfolded, can we presume to say, "Here we shall pause; here is a point beyond which there is for us no progress; we have reached the utmost verge of development; and all beyond is a fathomless abyss over which eternal darkness broods, and where there remaineth no more land to be possessed."

And as it is in the domain of Creation, so is it in the kingdom of Providence. Here, too, Jehovah reigns, and manifests, by the

same great law of progress, His control over all events. Occurrences which strike us with surprise, and startle us by their suddenness or their grandeur, are but steps in a mighty train of gradually unfolding results which are all tending towards still mightier consequences in the divine administration of our world. None of God's plans of dealing with our world have come to maturity all at once. Nations have their infancy, their youth, their manhood, no less than individuals. Look at the case of Israel. By what a slow, fluctuating, often interrupted, and yet ultimately successful progress, did the seed of Abraham advance towards the enjoyment of their destined national glory! Their bondage in Egypt, their wanderings in the wilderness, their incessant conflicts with the inhabitants of Canaan ere they could obtain a settlement in that land of promise, and all the long and changeful course of discipline through which they passed before they reached the culminating point of their prosperity under David and Solomon:—What a picture does all this furnish of the slow degrees and toilsome progress by which a nation advances to maturity! The case of

Israel was not singular in this respect; it was but an example of what is continually happening in the history of nations and peoples. How has it been, for instance, with our own country? We look upon her present estate with pride and triumph; we mark the vast extent of her dominion, the mighty influence of her name, the freedom and beneficence of her institutions, the comparative intelligence of her people, the prowess of her arms, the dauntless enterprise of her merchants, and how she sits a queen among the nations, and exacts the homage of distant tribes and ancient empires. But was all this the work of a few years, or of any one age? Assuredly not. Many and long-working have been the influences by which this greatness has been produced. The conflicts of warriors, the strife of parties, the wisdom of senates, the virtues and the grace of woman, the enterprise of traffickers, the struggles and the sufferings of patriots and martyrs, the discoveries of philosophy, the might of letters, the potency of deep and solitary thought, the elevating spirit of religion, the soul-quickenings of Scripture, the high aspirations of philanthropy:—

these, and many other such as these, have been the agencies out of whose ceaseless working, century after century, the grandeur and the felicity of our country have, through God's blessing, sprung. And so it is everywhere, as by the operation of a general law of Providence. However speedily nations sometimes fall, their rise is usually tardy, gradual, and difficult. It is but an exceptive case for a nation to be born as in a day. A hasty rise, when it does happen, is commonly the forerunner of an ignominious fall; as if the violation of a providential law had brought in its train the appropriate penalty.

And as it is with nations individually, so is it with the sum of them. God has mighty ends in store for the race of man on earth. He has destined this world to be the scene of a perfect triumph of light over darkness, of truth over falsehood, of good over evil, of joy over grief. He has determined to display His wisdom, His power, and His goodness in their highest forms on that field where they have been most questioned and insulted. He is about to cover the earth, which has been degraded and disturbed by sin, with the

manifestations of His glory, and to enclose it within a kingdom of unsullied purity and of perfect peace. He has a plan of this and a purpose of this. He cannot be turned from it; He cannot be baffled in it. He has bound Himself by an oath—an oath to His co-equal Son, and an oath to His covenanted church—that this shall be. He *will* do it. But it is His pleasure, His wise and gracious pleasure, that this grand result should come to pass tardily, and by a gradual process. All things are working towards it, but they are working as parts of a vast machine whose separate elements seem to move rapidly, but whose ultimate results are evolved only by slow degrees. So immense, indeed, is the scale of this working, that to us it often occasions perplexity, partly from the confusion which sometimes seems to reign in it, and partly from its movement seeming to be backwards rather than progressive. But this is only our infirmity. This machine, fit to be superintended only by an omnipotent arm, is cognisable, in all its parts, only by an omniscient eye. To God's view its whole working is orderly and progressive. His hand is upon all its springs,

and it acts without impediment and without irregularity. What appears to us perplexing is only the result of His having subjected its working to that great law of gradual development which we perceive to pervade other departments of His operations. Step by step He will evolve His plan and secure His purpose. The world will become ever brighter and better. The cause of meekness, truth, and righteousness, on behalf of which the Great King to whom God has given this world has rode forth, will ever win new successes and secure new territories. And not until the history of earth closes, and the course of time is absorbed into the vastness of eternity, will this career of conquest be arrested, or the word be passed through the marshalled hosts that there remaineth no more land to be possessed.

But it is not merely as a nation among the nations that the principle of God's dealings with Israel in the case before us is instructive and interesting; it is as much so when we view the nation of Israel as the type of the Church of God, and see adumbrated in its outward fortunes the course and history

of that spiritual community which God has been pleased to plant in our world. To this community, as to the ancient Israel, He has given a promise, and a task—a promise that the world shall be theirs—that they shall inherit the earth; and a task in the necessity which He has imposed upon them, of patiently, perseveringly, and faithfully employing those means by which this promise is to be fulfilled. Of the city and state of our God upon earth, the things which He hath spoken are very glorious; but as with the people who followed Joshua, so is it with those who follow Jesus, it is only by hard struggles, indomitable perseverance, and continuance to the end, that the glory thus set before them can be realized. It has been so with the church hitherto, and we have no right to expect that it will be otherwise so long as Satan possesses as much as to set his foot on here. How tardy has been the church's progress in past years! Amidst what apparent difficulties has that progress been effected! Through what a changeful career has she struggled! By what hard conflicts have her victories been won! And yet her course has been steadily

onward. After all there has been growth in her. However tardy and fluctuating her career, it has been on the whole a triumphant one. She has risen with the increase of years. She has expanded amid the pressure of adversity. She has become more skilful and robust by the necessities of conflict. She is not the babe she once was. She is not the despised, the hated, the persecuted outcast she has been. Her potency is now acknowledged. Her right to an empire of her own is now unquestioned. Her name has gone into all the earth, and her words unto the end of the world. Her reputation is world-wide. Her trophies are on every shore. Her banner is unfurled on every breeze. The sun never sets on her empire. Her oracles are read in almost every tongue. The stone cut out of the mountain has grown as it rolled, and amidst its dashings from crag to crag has by a new and peculiar law swelled its bulk and consolidated its strength, until it bids fair ere long to fill the whole earth. And if there yet remaineth much land to be possessed, the voice of experience, no less than the Word of God, is saying to the church, "Go up

and possess the land; and go with the step of a conqueror."

Now, as with the Israelites of old, so with the church in our own day, there is in respect of the matter before us a two-fold danger with which its enterprise is threatened. There is the danger, on the one hand, of an indolent, self-congratulatory satisfaction; there is the danger of a morbid, impatient, distrustful spirit of discontent upon the other. Under the influence of the former we sit still when we ought to be active, enjoying the calm of home when the trumpet summons to the conflict; under the influence of the latter we can neither sit still nor be usefully active; it robs us of the enjoyment of home, and makes us doubt the sufficiency of our accoutrements for the field. The tendency of either feeling is to paralyze and render inert; and whenever the church at large, or any part of it, is extensively visited by such feelings, the necessary consequence will be that its proper work will be but very partially done, its best interests but partially secured, and its honour and influence in the community seriously endangered.

The great law, then, in all departments of

God's working is, that only by slow degrees, and constant steady growth, perfection can be attained, and all that his servants are called to do can be done. It concerns, us, therefore, to have this clearly before our minds, and to go to the work which God has laid upon us, as Christians, under a distinct and constant recognition of it. The ground we have to occupy must be gained inch by inch. The enemies which now possess the land must be cast out one by one. Many a hard battle must be fought, and many sad reverses endured, ere the crown be seized, and the whole land be won. Let us not, then, mistake our position as the followers of Christ. Let us bear in mind, on the one hand, that it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom; and, on the other hand, that into that kingdom we shall not enter without much tribulation. Having entered on the promised land, let us not rest until all be ours. Let not a few conquests satisfy us or seduce us into dangerous repose, nor, on the other hand, let the long and toilsome course we have to pursue fill us with impatience or disgust. Let the successes we may have had inspire us

with confidence for what yet remains; and if we have had reverses and buffetings let us not lose heart, but the rather nerve ourselves more valiantly than ever for the fray. A little more of patient, steady, onward, well-directed effort, and the fair and fertile land is ours. The wilderness is already passed; the earnest of the rich possession is already in our hands; we have tasted the bunches of Eshcol, and seen how the land floweth with milk and honey. We have but to press steadily and bravely forward to make the whole our own, in the name and to the glory of our God and Saviour.



XV.

PROGRESSIVE PIETY.

“ But now, being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”—ROM. vi. 22.

IT is a law, as we have seen, in the natural world, and in the world of event, that perfection or completeness is reached only by slow degrees, and germinant development. But this is not confined to these departments; it is exemplified no less in the moral and spiritual life of individuals. Here, too, there is growth, development, progress. Goodness no less than greatness springs and grows by degrees; and wickedness the same. Virtue has its birth, its infancy, its manhood; and so has vice. No man, said the ancient sage, becomes very

bad all at once; and as little does any man become very good all at once. The facile descent to the seething pit of hell is step by step; the laborious return from any point in that descent to a higher is also step by step. It is not usually by one sudden leap that man plunges into the outer darkness; nor is it on soaring wings that he ascends to the light of heaven. It is by plodding downwards that men become fit for the society of devils; it is by plodding upwards that they become meet to stand in the glorious presence of God. There is a law of moral no less than a law of physical continuity. We cannot shake ourselves free of it. It is not given to man to be either perfectly bad or perfectly good, save by slow degrees and gradual development.

This great law of our moral nature is recognized by the apostle in this context. He is speaking here of the former state of believers before they were in Christ, in contrast with the state into which they had been brought through faith in Him; and of both he makes it a characteristic that it is by a process of growth that completeness is attained. He further intimates that the process once

begun has a tendency to go on if not arrested from without, whether it be of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. Leaving what he says of the former of these processes, we shall endeavour to pursue the delineation he gives of the latter.

The first step in this good course is to be "made free from sin." The idea here is that of the manumission or emancipation of a slave. Paul represents the sinner as under captivity, as a bondsman and a slave in the house of sin, and as compelled there to do the sad work of death. Now, in contrast to this he represents the believer as emancipated and set free; his chains broken, his fetters unloosed, and all his powers left free to follow the path of goodness and of life.

It seems desirable and proper to understand this emancipation here in the *widest* sense, as referring not only to freedom from the power of sin, but also to freedom from the guilt of sin. There are two things which go to the entire freedom of the man who would serve God: he must be without fear, and he must be without fetter. If he be under fear—that fear which hath torment—all

his energies will be paralyzed, all his vigour relaxed; he will crouch when he should be active, and run to hide himself among the trees of the garden when he should come forth to meet his God. So also if he be fettered and tied with the chain of evil, it is impossible for him to be active and energetic in the practice and the pursuit of good; he will be like a man who would run a race, but whose feet are fastened, or a combatant who would struggle with an adversary, but is pinioned and kept down by an overmastering bond. The man must be free of both these sources of weakness if any good is to come out of him. He must be delivered from the bond of fear by having his guilt forgiven; he must be delivered from the bond of evil by having that evil out-rooted from his heart. And when *both* these have taken place with a man, he is then, but not till then, "free from sin."

Now, on the man who believes the gospel a change in both these respects passes. By the belief of "the truth as it is in Jesus," by a hearty reception of the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, and a sincere reliance on his finished atonement, he

becomes one with Christ, obtains through Him the full remission of all his guilt, becomes dead to the law and authority of sin, and is risen again to a new life of goodness and holiness. It is not meant by this to assert that the believer never sins. Alas! were such an assertion made, how promptly would it be refuted by every believer's conscience, and by the events of his daily life! But though there is no man in this life that sinneth not, there is a mighty and momentous difference between the case of the man who sins, and repents and is forgiven, and that of the man who sins and refuses to repent, and carries on with him the still accumulating burden of his guilt; and a no less mighty and momentous difference is there between the man who sins *in spite* of his bonds, and the man who sins *because* of his bonds. In the one case sin is clean against the better and prevailing nature of the man; in the other, there is no better nature for sin to oppose, and the prevailing nature of the man is all for sin. In the one the man sins with his heart; in the other, the man sins against his heart. The unconverted man *abides* in the way of sin; the converted man has to forsake his own

path, and turn into the way of sin to get to it. The rule of the one is that he obeys the flesh in the lusts thereof; the rule of the other is that he obeys the spirit, and mortifies the flesh with its affections and lusts. There is all the difference between the two that there is between a slave doing his own slave's work, and a free man unworthily or unthinkingly stooping for a season to the level of the slave. The one must continue to slave on until his emancipation comes; the other is already free, and can return to his own place whenever he wills.

What, then, must first be done before any one can be on the way to life is, that he must get "free from sin." He must seek the pardon of his guilt through the blood of the cross, and he must enjoy the deliverance from the power of sin which He who died upon the cross can alone bestow. No man can be holy or fit for heaven otherwise. If a load of unforgiven guilt continue to hang around us; if a chain, woven of the love of sin, and the habit of sinning, continue to fetter us, all our efforts to become good and holy, and acceptable to God, will be impotent and fruitless. We may

have our dream of moral goodness, but it will be only a dream. We may have our strivings after holiness and godliness, but they will be like the struggles of a man under nightmare, who has a purpose of doing mighty deeds, but is held back by some mysterious power that sits paramount over his energies, and enthrals his every effort. It is not given to the unpardoned sinner to serve God. It is not possible for the thrall of sin to run in the way of holiness. The debt of sin must be cancelled, else will the officer hold the sinner fast in prison. Our feet must be cleared of the entanglement of sin, else will the arch-deceiver lead captive at his pleasure. Only Christ, who has paid our debt and bought our freedom, can deliver us from the burden and the bond of sin. But "if the Son make us free, then shall we be free indeed."

The next step in this good process is to "become the servants of God." When a man is made free from the guilt and the power of sin, he does not thereby become the absolute proprietor of himself. This is not his destiny; not the destiny of any creature; and man is in no way adapted to it. He was made at first to belong to and to serve God.

For this all his powers were given; for this he was placed in this world; for this God revealed himself to him; and in this alone can his true liberty, his real honour, and his highest felicity, be found. No sooner, then, is a man made free by the gospel from the dominion of sin, than he reverts to this the primary end of his being, and becomes "the servant of God." The very power which breaks his chains brings him under a sacred obligation to serve God. Freed from the debt of sin, he feels himself a debtor to the grace which set him free. Rescued by the hand of love, a flame has been kindled in his bosom, which *must* mount upwards, and bear him towards its original source. Both by the act of his redemption, and by the motives which the grace of that redemption inspires, he is urged to "yield himself unto God;" to offer himself to God, "a living sacrifice;" and freed from sin, to hold himself for all his subsequent existence, "the servant of God."

This servitude is an honourable, a reasonable, and a holy servitude. It consists in an intelligent recognition of and a grateful submission to God's rightful claims over us as His

creatures, and as redeemed by His grace. It shews itself in a prompt and cheerful doing of all His holy will, as revealed to us for our obedience. It is stimulated and quickened by a deep and sincere delight in the divine favour, and an ardent desire for the divine glory. There is nothing slavish in it, nothing mean or degrading. All is dignified, reasonable, and becoming. It is the acting of a free will under the highest motives, and in obedience to the highest laws. It is the harmonious concurrence of a created and dependent mind with the great ruling Mind of the universe. It is the repose of an unclouded intellect, and an unbiassed affection in the truthfulness and goodness of God.

Here, then, is the next great step in this divine progression. They who through grace have been made free from sin, must bring their liberated powers, and consecrate all to the service and glory of God. The third great step in this path of life, is "the having fruit unto holiness." *Fruit*, here, we take to mean *result*, or *product*; and the apostle's assertion is tantamount to saying, "the *result* of your living now—the fruit of your whole moral

being, is towards holiness; that is, is increasing holiness in you." The doctrine taught here is, that when a man is made free from sin, he enters upon a course, the *result* of which is holiness, and in this advancing holiness is found the next and most productive stage of his heavenward life.

What is holiness? Not simple goodness; but goodness viewed in relation to sin. Were there no sin there would be no holiness, strictly speaking. There would be moral purity, goodness, and virtue; but as holiness is purity recoiling from pollution, virtue recoiling from vice, goodness recoiling from evil, it cannot exist save as its opposites exist. When we say that God is holy, we do not mean merely that He is morally good and pure; we mean that His nature recoils from all evil; that He is utterly separated from it; that He cannot look on it. Now the same kind of thing is meant when we say of man that he is holy.

Hence, it is easy to see how the result of serving God should be towards holiness. The mere doing of God's will cannot produce positive *goodness* in a man, just because a man

must be good before he can do that will. But it naturally tends to produce in that man a *love* to goodness, and a *dislike* of its opposite. Suppose a man to become the servant of God; as a consequence of this, he does the will of God, from a sense of duty. But at first, virtue thus performed may be found irksome; there may be no affection in the heart for the thing performed; no strong or ready recoil from its opposite. What is done, is done from a sense of duty and obligation; from an honourable motive it is true, but yet without that full and overflowing sense of delight which would result from a real and deep-rooted love for the thing itself. To produce this result, then, is manifestly desirable, for without it the moral excellence of the man is not complete. But how is it to be produced? The language of Paul suggests the reply; It is by continuing to serve God. If we go on doing our duty, by and by what was first done merely from a sense of obligation, will come to be done from love to the thing itself. The service of God is good; it is intrinsically excellent; it is perfectly adapted to us, and to the promotion of our felicity. By continuing

to do it a sense of this will grow on us, and the real loveliness and value of God's law will unfold itself to us; the doing of our hand will come to be the delight of our heart; that which was at first a way of performance merely, will come to be a way of pleasantness; and so it will be found that the grand result of serving God is "towards holiness."

There are many analogies by which this process of our regenerated nature might be illustrated. Take, for instance, the case of a child learning to read. At first, his efforts are simple acts of obedience. He sees no excellence in his daily tasks. He performs them simply because his master bids him. But as he advances, learning takes hold of his mind. There is a fitness in it to interest and engross him. He sees how good it is to have knowledge, and he feels how pleasant it is to hold intercourse with other minds by books. He comes to feel as if he could not live without this exercise. It has grown to be part and parcel of his being, his chosen occupation, and his highest treat. And thus, what he at first did simply because his master bade him do it, has, by the mere act of doing it, grown

to be a treasured delight to him. Of that child's service to his teacher, we may surely say that the fruit of it has been towards a love of letters.

Just so is it with the case before us. We begin God's service because He calls us to it; we end by loving the service for its own sake. And this is an advanced stage of the divine life. It implies a greater likeness to God, who doth that which is good, not from any outward obligation, but from the free and unalterable propensity of His eternal nature towards that which is good. We thus cease to be servants, and grow into the life and liberty of sons. Our obedience to God has brought us in happy advance towards His presence. We have been doing the will of the Father, and the consequence is, that our own will has become identified with His. Inclination and duty now go hand in hand. The sense of bondage has disappeared, and a sweet sense of free choice has come in its place. We have learned what it is to be holy as God is holy. By serving Him we have found our fruit unto holiness.

The last stage of this blessed process is the glorious consummation of the whole, "the

end everlasting life." The life here spoken of, is life in all the senses in which Christ bestows it; life of acceptance, life of purity, life of joy and glory. And it is easy to see how the whole preceding process should tend towards this. Is it a life of *acceptance*? Ere we can be accepted, we must be freed from sin. Is it a life of *purity*? Ere we can live in perfect purity above, we must be the servants of God here, whose fruit is unto holiness. Is it a life of perfect *joy and glory*? As that glory and joy is not material or sensual, but the joy of a spirit reposing on its God, and the glory of a soul that is resplendent in his image, ere we can partake of these, we must have learned to love all goodness, and to find our highest satisfaction in the things of God. The process is thus continuous from the first to the last. Heaven begins on earth, and earth merges into heaven. The service of the footstool prepares for the service on the throne. The discipline of time fits for, and conducts to the glory of eternity. Obedience growing into love, is the natural preparative for a state where love is perfect and obedience is complete.



XVI.

THE EVER-ENDURING NAME.

"His name shall endure for ever."—Ps. lxxii. 17.

WERE a person not much acquainted with literature to take a survey of a large and well-stored historical library, he would possibly be very much struck with the vast multitude of books in the department of *Biography*, which he would find in such a collection. Or, let him turn over the pages of a biographical dictionary, and he would certainly be struck with the immense number of persons of whom something could be told, and whose standing in the world has been such that it is found worth while to perpetuate their memory in biographical narrative. But whatever might be the feeling which would be excited in his mind by such a survey, it would probably

occur to him to reflect, and that with an emotion of pensiveness, on the enormously larger number of persons who have lived and died on this earth, of whom nothing, not even their names, remains to be told, and who have apparently passed away without leaving any permanent impression of their existence on the world. He would be led to think, that numerous as are the persons of whom one can read in books, they form but a hardly expressible fraction of the *whole* number of intelligent and accountable beings who have inhabited this earth; nay, but a mere fraction of the men of their own age; nay, but a very small portion even of their own countrymen; and that, whilst much remains, incalculably more has been lost that appertains to the history of man upon earth. He would be led also naturally to ponder the exceedingly limited number out of those whose names *have* been preserved, of whom the mass of mankind knows anything at all; and in prosecuting his researches, either in the library or in the dictionary, nothing would surprise him more than the multitude of persons whose life and character have been put on record, but of whom he had never so

much as heard. . And then this idea would probably also occur to him, that of those whose names are best known in the world, and of those whose biographies are most fully written, how little after all is known, compared with what is irrecoverably lost concerning them. You take up, perhaps, a thick octavo volume, and you say, "Dear me, what a huge book to be all about one man!" And yet what a mere dribble does all that this volume contains form of the whole amount of that man's actual life—his thoughts—his feelings—his experience—his actions—all, in short, that makes the man. Alas! the greater part is lost for ever, except as traces of it may be written upon the individual's memory, to be deciphered by him in the revealing light of eternity, or as a record of it is preserved in the mind of the Omniscient! And then, of that which *is* preserved in human history, how much is there that is anything but to the honour of the individual; how much of folly, vanity, or viciousness, do even the most friendly biographers let drop as having marked the life of the party who is the subject of their book! So that the conclusion to which

such a person as we have supposed would naturally come is—How vain after all is earthly reputation! What an empty thing is posthumous fame! How few men are remembered after they are gone! How many of those who are remembered are so for their crimes or their cruelties! And of those who are held in reputation, how many are there who are best known by acts or attributes which, were they now to return to the earth, they would be the first to renounce and deplore! Truly in this respect all is indeed “vanity and vexation of spirit!”

Amidst such reflections, how delightful to turn to such an announcement as that in the verse placed at the head of this paper. Here is One whose memory shall be held in universal respect, “for all men shall call Him blessed.” Here is One from whose excellence no detraction can be made, and whose fame the finger of calumny shall never sully, for “men shall be blessed in Him.” Here is One who shall never be forgotten, for “His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun.”

That it is the Messiah of whom the

psalmist here speaks has been the belief of the church since ever the psalm was composed; of none other but Him could such things be said as are here predicated of the subject of this inspired song; and all attempts on the part of unbelieving and rationalistic interpreters to shew that the psalm is susceptible of another reference, have only proved their own ignorance or prejudiced hostility to the truth.*

The ever-enduring name, then, belongs to Him who has come to save us. And what is His name?

Properly speaking, His name is the revealed truth concerning Him. But in Scripture the appellation by which a person or being is designated, is often significative of the qualities by which he is characterized; and this is especially the case with the divine names. All these are revelations or declarations of God to us, by the just apprehension of which we attain to just thoughts concerning Him. It is the same with the appellations

* See Hengstenberg's Commentary on the Psalms on the place. Alexander's Connection and Harmony of the Old and New Testaments, p. 243, 2d ed.

given to our Saviour in Scripture; all these are significant of truth concerning Him; all of them are speaking symbols of His perfections and His qualities. When, therefore, it is asked, What is His name? we cannot answer the question better than by setting forth the meaning of the appellations which He bears in Scripture.

What is His name? It is IMMANUEL—God with us; God in the midst of us; God on our side. It was once asked by the pious author of this psalm, “Will God in very deed dwell upon the earth?”* and among all peoples the idea of a descending and incarnate deity has formed part of their creed, and given life to the most attractive fictions of heathen mythologies. It belongs to Christianity alone to give the true answer to this question. In the record of the life of Christ alone have we the embodiment of this idea, and the fulfilment of this desire in a real person. When Jesus appeared on earth He was “God manifest in the flesh.” Embodied, visible, tangible, He visited the homes, and shared in the sympathies, and partook of the

* 1 Kings viii. 27.

fare, and submitted to the sufferings and sorrows of ordinary men. Men saw Him, and conversed with Him, and companied with Him; He went in and out among them like one of themselves; yet ever with a strange superhuman halo about Him that spoke of heaven, and made those who were most intimate with Him to feel that in beholding Him they beheld the glory of the only begotten Son of God. And as He was thus *among* men, so He was *for* men—their God who had come to save them. He brought God down to them that He might lift them up to God. He veiled His Deity in humanity that He might give man assurance of His love; He glorified His humanity by His deity, that He might give man assurance of His power. He came to bring man back to obedience, and restore harmony between the Creator and the creature; and He did so by becoming Himself obedient even unto death, and presenting to the wondering gaze of the intelligent universe the nature of the creature in union with the nature of the Creator in His one person. His name is Immanuel.

What is His name? It is JESUS—the

Saviour. When He entered our world it was with the gracious purpose that men through Him might be saved. He came not merely to do what good He could in any way; He came specially to save sinners, to seek and to save the lost; and on this account He was by divine command called "Jesus, because He should save His people from their sins." When He was a babe in Bethlehem, angels announced Him as a Saviour born for men. When He appeared on the banks of Jordan He was pointed out by His forerunner as the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. When he unfolded His doctrine and His claims to the people of Samaria, they joyfully received His message, and exclaimed, "Now we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." When He expired upon the accursed tree, "He gave His life a ransom for many," that they might be saved. When He was brought again from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, it was as "a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sins." As a Priest in the heavenly temple, He pursues

His merciful vocation, "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto the Father by Him." And when He shall come again, it will be without sin unto salvation; and then shall be the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, to gladden and to glorify all them that look for it.* It is thus, from first to last, as a *Saviour* that He manifests Himself to men. From Him in this relation all spiritual blessing comes to us. As our Saviour He gives us peace; as our Saviour He sends on us renewal; as our Saviour He receives us into His everlasting kingdom; as our Saviour He has abolished death, and promises us the victory over it; and in His own time He will appear as the Saviour upon Mount Sion, to judge the mount of Esau, and then shall the kingdom be the Lord's.†

What is His name? It is **Jehovah our Righteousness.** Man, as a sinner, is desti-

* Matt. i. 21; Luke ii. 11; John i. 29; iv. 42; Matt. xx. 28; Acts v. 31; Heb. vii. 25; ix. 28; Tit. ii. 13.

† Tit. i. iv.; ii. 6; 2 Pet. i. 11; 2 Tim. i. 10; Obad. 21.

tute of all righteousness in the sight of God. With whatever gifts endowed, in whatever esteem held by his fellow-men, there is no individual of our race who is not, in the eye of God's law, a sinner, and consequently subject to His righteous condemnation. Before Him there is none righteous, no not one. But what man has not in himself, Christ has brought to him. In Him, the Lord, have we righteousness and strength. We are justified by faith in His blood. The robe of His perfect righteousness is cast around those that are His, so that they stand before God accepted in the beloved, arrayed in fine linen clean and white, absolved from all guilt, cleared of every charge, the sons of God without rebuke, the heirs of an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away. All this comes to them through Christ, and through Him alone. He is made of God unto them righteousness, and they are made the righteousness of God in Him.* "In His day Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell

* Is. xlv. 24; Rom. iii. 25; Eph. i. 6; Phil. ii. 15; 1 Pet. i. 4; 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21.

safely; and this is His name, whereby He shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness."*

What is His name? It is the ALPHA and the OMEGA, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, and the Living One, the Almighty who is, and who was, and who is to come,† in whose unchangeableness His people find their unfailing consolation, and whose eternal reign is the security to them of eternal glory and bliss at God's right hand. Because He lives, they shall live also. The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto *living* fountains of waters. Pillars in God's temple fixed by His hand, they shall go no more out.‡

Time would fail to enumerate all the names by which Christ is made known to us in Holy Scripture. Let these suffice as a specimen of the rest. Thus revealed to men, His name shall endure for ever. In these titles and appellations of the Redeemer there is a preciousness and a power which secure their immortality. In them is proclaimed that

* Jer. xxiii. 6

† Rev. i. 8, 17; ii. 8; xxii. 13.

‡ John xiv. 19; Rev. vii. 17; iii. 12.

which is for the healing of the nations; and unto Him who bears them shall the gathering of the nations be. They that know these names rejoice to publish them; voice catches up the sound after voice; they that dwell afar off, and in lonely places, hear and prolong the joyful notes; ere long His fame shall encircle the globe, and be uttered in all tongues; and amidst the jubilee of the nations one shout shall be heard above all others, "Blessed be His glorious name for ever. And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen!"



XVII.

SONGS IN PRISON.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God; and the prisoners heard them."—
Acts xvi. 25.

I THINK a valuable and intensely interesting book might be written under some such title as "Prison Experiences and Utterances"—the design of which should be to collect and set forth in proper manner, and with due effect, the recorded behaviour and sayings of men and women who have tasted the experience of prison life. The design of such a book would not be to draw fine and affecting pictures of fictitious scenes, such as one finds, for instance, in Shakespeare, or the unequalled pages of Scott. The writer would confine himself to recorded historical facts

gleaned from sources of unimpeachable authenticity ; and his aim would be to set forth the real facts simply, truthfully, and impressively. Such a book would strikingly illustrate the statement that "fact is stranger than fiction." What a record it would be ! What strange phases of human nature it would unfold ! What impressive lessons it would utter ! What startling contrasts it would present !— here a hardened criminal glorying in his guilt, there a sorrowing penitent bowed down under a sense of shame and remorse, yonder a terrified ruffian trying to conceal his fears of coming punishment under an outward bravado, here again a high-souled patriot, who felt that his offence against law was a homage to rectitude, and a sacrifice for his country's good, and who in patience possessed his soul believing that "the good cause was the good cause still," whatever might befall its advocates ! What different voices—what strangely contrasted utterances would such a volume preserve !—the martyr's prayer, the penitent's confession, the stricken malefactor's cry for mercy, the confessor's high words of confidence in his cause and exhortation to its adhe-

rents, the last farewell of love, the last groan of despair. In one scene we should be introduced to a Socrates, talking sublime philosophy while waiting for death, and even as the poison he had been compelled to drink slowly diffused itself through his system ;* in another to a Russell, as he wound up his watch for the last time, exclaiming, "There, I have done with time : now eternity comes ;"† in another to a Bradford and a Taylor together lauding God and continuing in prayer, reading, and mutual exhortation, in the prospect of their fiery torture ;‡ in another to a Ridley bidding his friends farewell on the night before his execution, with cheerful words as of one who was going in the morning to his wedding, and when one offered to sit with him during the night, saying, "No, that you shall not ; for I mind (God willing) to go to bed and to sleep as quietly to night as ever I did in my life ;"§ in another to the

* See the Phædon of Plato, and Xenophon's Memorabilia.

† Russell, Life of Lord Russell, ii. 102.

‡ Foxe, Acts and Monuments, Bk. ii.

§ Ibid.

great and good Argyle, done to death by evil tongues, lying, within an hour of eternity, sleeping in his irons the placid sleep of infancy;* in another, to gentle Anne Askew, amid insult, and wrong, and misery, with every limb so bruised and broken by the rack that she could not stand, and with every feeling of womanhood outraged and wronged by what she had endured, inditing her noble chant, "albeit all unused to write," that she might record how Christ's strength was made perfect in her weakness, and how, mere girl as she was, she was prepared to meet death—

" Like as the armed knight,
Appointed to the field." †

These, and many other such like noble records of humanity would such a book contain, for there are many such to be gleaned from the pages of history. I would it were written! it would be worth a library of moral harangues, and would be more interesting than any novel that was ever penned.

In such a record the incidents in the early

* Macaulay, *Hist. of England*, I. 564.

† Foxe, bk. viii.

history of Christianity to which this paper relates would find a prominent place. Here is a prison scene and a prison utterance. In a gloomy, perhaps loathsome dungeon, and surrounded by the offscourings of society, are two men, one of them a man of birth, education, and high talents; his companion, perhaps, the same. They have just endured the cruel torture and disgraceful infliction of the scourge, and in the prison they are made fast with chains and fetters, treated as if they were the worst and most dangerous of criminals, though their only offence had been that of delivering a poor demoniac from her tyrant, and preaching the truth concerning that great Deliverer by whose strength they could cast out devils. Smarting from their wounds, and constrained by their fetters, sleep has fled from their eyes, and the weary hours of night have to be spent in watching. How do they employ themselves during that weary watch? With what do they seek to solace their agony? Do they proclaim their wrongs, denounce their persecutors, invoke maledictions on those who had despitefully used them? No; it is the voice of prayer and of worship that proceeds from

them. They break the silence of the midnight hour in that inner prison with songs of praise and jubilee. There is no tremor, no misgiving in their voice; their notes sound out full and clear, so that "the prisoners heard them."

And no doubt it was with great marvel and amazement that they heard them. They were not wont to hear such sounds in that gloomy abode. Had it been the yell of wrath, the groan of despair, the shout of defiance, the curse of hate, or even the ribald song of reckless depravity, they would have given it no heed; such were but the common-places of that dark and miserable scene. But songs of praise—that *was* something new and strange! Why, these men must be *happy*, in spite of their sufferings and wrongs! They must be possessed of something which stands them in good stead, and is sufficient for them amid the loss of all that men most prize, and the endurance of what all men instinctively shrink from with abhorrence! The case is a singular one—worth thoughtfully looking at. Let us inquire for a little to what this strange phenomenon is to be traced.

These men were happy in the consciousness that what they retained of their possessions was immensely more valuable than what they had lost.

The measure of happiness depends not so much on what a man possesses of good absolutely, as on the relation of what he has to what he wants. The great reason why men are so often unhappy amid an abundance of good things, is, that their sense of want is greater than their sense of possession. A man with a competent income is unhappy because he wants to have a fortune; a man with great wealth is unhappy because he wants titles, distinction, and fame; and so of other cases. On the other hand, but on the same principle, the effect of any calamity upon a man's happiness is determined, not by the greatness of the calamity in itself, so much as by the relation which the mischief it inflicts bears to what the man retains unaffected by it. What cares the lord of a thousand acres because the wind has blown down a tree or two on some corner of his estate! What cares the man of boundless wealth for the injustice which has robbed him of a few shillings!

Who, in the enjoyment of robust health, would allow himself to be depressed because one of his fingers aches? The loss is no doubt a loss; the suffering is no doubt a suffering; and so long as the mind attends *only* to it, there may be both annoyance and impatience. But whenever the mind realises that whatever be gone, immensely more remains; whatever be painful, there is still retained what is pleasant in immensely larger degree; the balance of equanimity is recovered, and the man enjoys, so far as this is concerned, peace.

Now, just so was it with these men. They had suffered, and suffered severely; wrong, insult, torture, had been heaped on them; and they were still suffering. But they felt that they retained, and carried with them into that inner prison, what was infinitely more valuable to them than all they had lost—what infinitely outmeasured all they had endured. Whatever they had lost, they had not lost their all, nor the most valuable part of their all. They had lost liberty of motion; but they retained “the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” They had been deprived of

the rights and immunities of earthly citizenship; but they retained their citizenship in heaven—their charter unimpeached and their immunities undiminished. They had been entreated with the cruellest indignities, but they were, for all that, “sons of God,” “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” They were “cast down, but not destroyed—afflicted, but not in despair.” They had a hope which made them not ashamed. Amid the loss of all earthly possessions, they retained “unsearchable riches.” Living by faith, and not by sight, they estimated the relative worth of things by a spiritual standard. They judged that to be precious which was heavenly and spiritual; that which was earthly to be transient and of little worth. They were thus led, whilst secure of heavenly blessings, to treat earthly trials as comparative trifles. They called them “light afflictions that were but for a moment.” Their treasure was in heaven, and their heart was there also. Let the world take from them what it would, it could not touch that treasure, nor defraud them of that inheritance which was “reserved in heaven for them.” This goes far to ex-

plain their peace amid calamity, their serenity amid suffering. We can understand them when they tell us of themselves that they "were sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," that they "had nothing, yet possessed all things." Their conduct, on the occasion we are considering, was of a piece with their entire character and conduct. It was conduct such as became men who felt that the blessings they retained immeasurably transcended anything they might have lost.

These men were happy, further, because they knew the value of the sufferings they had been called to endure.

We judge of the value of things by the end to which they lead—by the good that comes out of them; and we are affected by them as they pass over us, not so much by what they are in themselves, as by what we know they are tending to effect. What merchant, for instance, is depressed by the toil, and foresight, and watchful care by which he knows that he is realizing a fortune? What student is cast down by the weary exhaustion of protracted and anxious research, when he knows that by this he is piling up stores of

knowledge, and hewing out a path for himself to influence and fame? What soldier would suffer himself to be dispirited by danger or difficulty when he knows that these are encountered on the road to victory? Such things, it is true, are not in themselves pleasant, but all that is disagreeable in them is lost in the value set on the end to which they lead. So was it with these men. They knew that there was *fruit* in their affliction—fruit that should be found after many days. They knew that they had not suffered in vain; they had paid a heavy price, but they were assured of a far richer return.

They knew the value of affliction and trial for themselves. They recognized it as part of the needful discipline by which they were to be fitted for a throne and a crown. It was not pleasant, certainly, to pass through so hot a fire; but it was infinitely better to do that than not get rid of the dross and corruption that still adhered to their fallen nature. In their estimation the renovation of the heart, the purification of the life, the conformation of the soul to the image of Christ, were the highest of all blessings, for which it

was worth a man's while to suffer the loss of all things. They, therefore, "gloried in tribulation," because they knew that by that the great end of their spiritual life was to be promoted. It was not that they were insensible to their present sufferings, but they looked to the *end*, and in that they found an over-balancing compensation for all they had endured. They were not insensible to the pain, and shame, and wrong they had endured and were enduring; but what of that when they knew that out of such trials came the fruit of affliction, which is the salvation of the soul. For that end they were willing not only to pray and labour, but also to suffer. In every indignity they endured, and in every pang they felt, they saw but that which was working out for them "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." No wonder, therefore, that their minds rose above their sufferings, that their souls expanded beyond their prison house, that their chains and fetters seemed light and easy, and that in the silence of that sleepless midnight the walls of their dungeon re-echoed the unwonted sounds of their songs of praise.

They knew also the value of their sufferings to the cause in which they were embarked. It is not given to such a cause as that to prosper without suffering on the part of those who seek to promote it. This is part of the price which they must pay for success. It is also a *means* to success; for the example of devotedness, self-consecration, and noble endurance which the supporters and promoters of a good cause are enabled, by the very opposition they encounter, and the very persecution they endure, to furnish, has a mighty, though it may be unacknowledged, effect in drawing towards it the respect, confidence, and ultimate adherence of the mass. Of all this the apostles of Christ were fully aware; and therefore, when suffering and wrong came on them for the cause of Christ, they held it to be so much thrown into the scale in favour of that cause—a cause dearer to them than all besides—and they rejoiced accordingly not only amidst, but because of their sufferings.

These men were happy, in fine, because they counted it an honour and a privilege to suffer for Christ.

The Apostle Peter, writing to persons who were liable to be grievously maltreated because they were Christians, says, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."* And such an advice came well from this Apostle, because he had himself exemplified the advice he gave: when shamefully and cruelly beaten for his attachment to Christianity, he departed rejoicing "that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." In the estimation of these Christians, then, it was counted an honourable thing to suffer for Christ; and when this came upon them they went away rejoicing. Does this seem strange to any? Let them think of the power of *love* to change the whole character of things according to their relation to the object loved. Let them think how it makes sacrifice and suffering for that object not only tolerable, but a positive source of the purest and highest joy. Let them mark how it makes men exult to suffer for an earthly sovereign, or to suffer for a friend or beloved relation. Do any imagine it was not a joy

* 1 Pet. iv. 16.

and a glory to "that fair saint who sat by Russell's side" to take her place there and act as his secretary on his trial, though it exposed her woman's delicacy to the gaze of the rude, and subjected her to the frown of the powerful? Do any suppose that of those noblemen and gentlemen who suffered on the scaffold for their attachment (misguided as it was) to the cause of the Stuarts, any dreamt for a moment that there was any disgrace in that? or that any of their descendants look back on it but as on a noble thing, a thing to be proud of? And if earthly love and loyalty can do this much, what may not love and loyalty to Christ do? With the Apostles this was a mighty mastering influence. It constrained them. They took pleasure in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, "for Christ's sake." They counted not their lives dear unto them so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus.* This was what turned this prison into a place for singing. Everything belonging to self was lost to them in the effulgence of the glory of

* 2 Cor. xii. 10; Acts xx. 24.

Christ, for whom they had suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung that they might win Christ.

If these things be so, what an instance have we here of the power of true religion to raise men above all the trials and sorrows of life, and fill them with a pure, ennobling, and enduring joy! Faith in Christ, love to Christ, devotedness to Christ, self-sacrifice for Christ—let these be in a man as supreme and constraining principles, and they will place him on an elevation from which he can look down alike on earth's joys and sorrows and say, with sublime indifference, "None of these things move me."



XVIII.

THE MOTHER AND THE MAN.

"O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid."—Ps. cxvi. 16.

THIS is not the only instance in which David, in pleading with God, lays stress on the fact that he is his mother's son. In Ps. lxxxvi. 16, we find the same plea: "Give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid." What is the inference to be drawn from this? What is the intention of such a reference? What the force of such a plea? Some think that it is merely a form of more emphatically expressing David's own subjection to God as His servant; as if he had said, "I am not only thy servant, but thy born servant; the son of one who was herself thine handmaid."

And to this there can be no objection, provided we regard David's mother as God's servant, in the same sense in which David himself was; and this the coherence of the whole passage, in both instances, requires. We must regard her, therefore, as a pious woman, who set her son the example of godliness and devotedness to the service of Jehovah; and, if she was so, doubtless David owed much to her early instruction, and felt himself laid under additional obligations by that and the remembrance of her piety to serve and obey God. His design here, then, is to represent his piety as hereditary; and he mentions his mother because to her especially, in all probability, his religious convictions and impressions were instrumentally due. It may be that it was to her instruction *exclusively* that he owed, under God, his early piety. There is little about what is said concerning his father to lead us to think very much of him in a religious point of view. He seems to have been a sort of dull country squire, with not many thoughts beyond his sheep, and not many aspirations beyond the advancement of himself and his family. He mani-

festly thought very little of his youngest son; perhaps because he was a quiet, thoughtful, pious lad, who liked better to make hymns and sing them, than to pursue those arts by which his older brothers were seeking to push their way in the world. Whilst they, then, were sent to the camp, David was doomed to the toils of a shepherd's life, or was relieved from these only to be the bearer of the old man's bounty to his more favoured sons. But his mother!—ah! one can fancy it was not so with her; one can fancy she had ever the kind word, and the fond caress, and the cheering encouragement, for her beautiful and gentle boy. No doubt, she was ready to welcome him when he came home, toiled and dispirited, from his rude occupation; no doubt her loving smile smoothed for him the rough path his father's sternness had marked out for him; and one can even fancy how, at times, she would go out to him to the fields, and talk to her listening child of the glory and the grace of Israel's God; and how his heart would open to her in the outpourings of a spirit that had been touched with the solemnities of the invisible world, and felt that, next to the

Omniscient, there was no ear so fit as that of a mother into which to pour its confessions and its hopes; or how, at other times, they would sit down together under some shady tree, and the young poet would sing one of the songs he had made to cheer his solitude, and the mother's heart would grow big with a prophetic gladness, and, kissing the ruddy cheek of her gifted boy, she would exclaim, "Take heart, my child; surely thou too shall yet be named amongst the singers in Israel." Ah! if aught of this were the case, how much does the church owe, under God, to the kindly wisdom of that godly mother!—for it is the mother, after all, that has most to do with the making or the marring of the man! How much David owed to her we cannot doubt. The memory of it abode with him through all the trials and all the splendours of his subsequent career; and hence, whilst nowhere does he mention his father, he seems, in the passages we have cited, to appeal to the memory of his mother's godliness as at once a special token of the divine favour to himself, and an additional reason why he should hold himself the servant of God.

There is another eminent servant of God, another of the great heroes of the Bible, who, we venture to think, stands forth as also an example of the power of a mother's early instructions. The Apostle, speaking of Moses, says, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."* Now, when we come to think of it, there is something very remarkable in this conduct of Moses. The decision which he thus made was come to by him after he came of age, when he was master of himself, when reason was fully developed within him, and when he could take a correct survey and estimate of the comparative claims of the two conditions. Up to this point he had enjoyed the honours and privileges of a son of the royal house; and it is not improbable that he saw the way open for him in due time to occupy the throne of Egypt. Perhaps, as a youth, he had not been altogether insensible to the attractions and worldly advantages of such a position; and

* Heb. xi. 24, 25.

for aught we can tell, he may even have been led astray to seek those "pleasures of sin" which in so wicked a court were easily to be found. The wonder, indeed, is that he should have had any thoughts or aspirations beyond these; and one feels curious to know how it was that a youth educated at such a court, and holding there the rank and estimation of a son of the king's daughter, ever came to have any leanings towards anything else than what he saw and enjoyed there; still more, to have any inclination to cast in his lot with a poor, despised, enslaved, and oppressed people like the Hebrews. We know of but one channel through which such an effect could have been produced upon him. When the princess rescued him from the river, and adopted him for her son, she was led, in the providence of God, to entrust him to the tender care of his own mother, that she might nurse him, and that mother was a woman of faith*—a woman who believed God, and looked for the Messiah whom He had promised, and who had confidence that when all the clouds that had settled down on the seed

* Heb. xi. 23.

of Abraham were cleared away, the destinies of the race to which she belonged would be the grandest in the world's history. May it not be well believed—is it too much to suppose—that as she nursed her beautiful child in the halls of the Pharaohs, she would tell him, as he was able to receive them, the wondrous traditions of her race, and pre-occupy his thoughts with the anticipated splendours of the reign of the Messiah, before he was old enough to be enslaved by the attractions of Egyptian royalty? Perhaps she would sometimes carry him to some safe retreat, where no ear could hear her, and there sing to him the hymns that belonged to the worship of her God—hymns composed by some of her shepherd ancestry, and sung by them round the altars which they erected amid their wanderings in the land of promise; or perchance, she needed not to seek retirement for such an exercise, for poetry and music were ever the rich heritage of her race, and she might be free to sing her melodies as she chose, that the ears of the Egyptians might be regaled with her music, even as, at a later period, those who had carried Israel captive required

of them a song, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." And that music would sink deep into the fine-toned soul of her child; and long years after, when tired with the clash and the clang and the revelry of the heathen court, that sweet and rich music would come back upon him, and call up to his recollection his mother's lessons, and awaken in him some longings after his own people, and some aspirations towards his father's God. It was thus, we believe, that godly seed was found in the heart of Moses, the caressed and indulged favourite of an imperial house. Amid all that he possessed, and all that he learned of the wisdom of Egypt there, he yet remembered the lessons of infancy; and like the sea-shell which, carried far from its original place, yet still

"Remembers its august abode,

And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there;"

he, in the palace of a foreign prince, reverted to the accents of his mother tongue, and clung to the faith which his mother had taught him. And so it was that when he was come to years, "he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

These may be regarded as instances in which the good seed fell into good soil, and in which the return was speedy as well as rich. But it is not always so; usually, we may say, it is not so. For the most part, the seed lies apparently dormant; the spring is long and unpromising; and the faith of the sower has to be exercised in a patient waiting for the promised growth. Nay, sometimes it seems as if all were lost, as if the seed had utterly perished, and as if the soil that had been so carefully cultured and watched over, must be hopelessly given up to desolation, or to rank and abominable weeds. But a mother's teachings have a marvellous vitality in them; there is a strange living power in that good seed which is sown by a mother's hand in her child's heart in the early dawn of the child's being, when they two are alone together, and the mother's soul gushes forth on her child, and the child listens to his mother as a God; and there is a deathless potency in a mother's prayers and tears for those whom she has borne, which only God can estimate. And so it often happens after long years, it may be, of sin and folly, on the

one side, and bitter grief and "hoping against hope," on the other, that the old true child's heart comes back again to the world-hardened, sin-deluded man; and the lessons of early life, learnt at a mother's knee, rise up with all the freshness of a present reality in the memory; and the seed that seemed dead and wasted suddenly asserts its vital power; and the heart on which the blight of evil had long rested, till all seemed a moral waste, becomes covered with verdure, and "the land that was desolate becomes as the garden of the Lord."

Sometimes the mother lives to see this blessed answer to her prayers, and to find in him who had been the sorrow of her earlier life, the joy, and the honour, and the prop of her declining years. I have often tried to realize to myself the scene which Augustine so grandly describes,* when, shortly before the death of his mother Monnica, he and she sat by the window and talked together of the "things above." "We conversed," says he, "very sweetly, and forgetting the things that were behind, and searching into those that are before, we investigated together into the pre-

* Confess., Book ix., chap. x.

sent truth—what Thou art (he is addressing God as he narrates), what is that eternal life of the saints which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man? And with longing desire we sought the supernal streams of thy fountain, the fountain of life which is with Thee, that, sprinkled therewith, according to our capacity, we might think such great things." And as they talked they were raised above all carnal interests and earthly cares, till they reached in thought the region of unfailing plenty, where God feeds Israel with the food of eternal truth, and heard Him whom they had learned to love in means and ordinances, speak to them without these, and in rapid thought attained to the eternal wisdom abiding over all, and so had a foretaste in that moment of intelligence of that eternal life to which they aspired. Long and sweetly they talked, and at length Monnica said, "My son, as for me, there is nothing in this life in which I delight. What I have now to do here, and why I am still here, I know not. There was one thing for which I sought to tarry a little longer in this life, and that was to see thee a true

Christian before I died. More than this hath God given me, since I see thee His servant, having relinquished the felicity of earth. What do I longer here?" She had not much longer to wait. Only a few days after, that "religious and pious soul was freed from the body," and she went to her rest, leaving her great son to work out that mighty work for which God, in blessing on her efforts, and in answer to her prayers, had selected and endowed him. It was a glorious end to a course of faithful motherly duty and poignant motherly anxiety. For Augustine, with that vast mind and that fiery temper of his, had gone wildly astray—astray into vicious indulgence, astray into wilful disobedience, astray into ruinous error; and many an arrow had he shot into that fond mother's heart. But she, the faithful one, stood by her post, counselling, beseeching, weeping, praying; and when at length he left her and went into a far country, determined to have his own wilful way, she settled her affairs, and girt on her sandals, and went after him, resolved that, wander whither he would, she would follow him until she either

brought him back to the fold, or died in the attempt. When at length she reached him at Milan, she found he was already in earnest about his soul, and on the way to become a Christian. She received the tidings calmly, because she had ever abode in the firm confidence that, before she died, she should see her son a Christian. But that end was not yet gained, and she set herself, with "denser tears and prayers," to plead with God, that He would accomplish the good work He had begun in her child. At length the desires of her heart were fulfilled; she saw her gifted son baptized for Christ, a minister of Christ, and then the full current of her joy broke forth. "She rejoiced, she exulted, she triumphed, and blessed God who had granted her beyond her expectations or askings."* Does any pious mother who reads this wonder that she so felt and acted?

"Had she not, then, for pains and fears,
The day of woe, the watchful night;
For all her sorrows, all her tears,
An over-payment of delight?"

But it is not always thus. Oftentimes

* Augustine, Confess., bk. vi. 1; viii. 30.

the pious mother carries her anxieties and her sorrows to the grave with her, and has to go away without any hope to cheer her as to her prodigal boy, perhaps not even knowing whether he is alive or dead. And yet the seed she sowed may, long after she is gone, quicken in that lost one's heart, and some happy angel may find her out among the myriads of the blessed, and convey to her the glad tidings that her child has returned from his wanderings, and come under the shelter of the everlasting covenant, and is serving the Lord in purity and holy zeal on earth, and in due time will be with her in that blessed place where they whom sin and death has divided shall clasp hands in a union which shall never be broken.

In the year 1746, on a small island lying off the western coast of Africa, there might be seen a young man of English birth living in a condition of the most abject misery. He was the servant, it might almost be said the slave of a trafficker in human flesh, who was himself, through his vile lusts, under the bondage of a ferocious negress, by whom his establishment was ruled with im-

perious and unrelenting tyranny. Against the English youth her heart was especially set, and she sought to make life bitter to him by every species of unkindness she could practise. She starved him; she caused him to be unjustly beaten; she instigated his master against him by false accusations; she refused him when burning with fever even the refreshment of a draught of cool water; and such was the barbarity to which she subjected him, that but for a naturally strong constitution, and the secret assistance of some of the poor slaves of the household, he must have perished. "I was so poor a figure," he himself afterwards wrote, "that when a boat's crew came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods from the sight of strangers." What had brought this youth, the son of respectable parents, and who had received a good education in his native country, to this deplorable condition? It was chiefly his own wickedness, recklessness, and folly. He had been a wild ungovernable youth, and had plunged himself into such an abyss of evil, that his friends felt it was hopeless to strive to save him, and so they left

him to sink. Who that saw that youth in his misery and his wickedness, could have believed it possible that ere many years had passed he should be one of the most influential clergymen in the British metropolis, a man of devoted piety and zeal for God, a man loved, respected, looked up to by the whole religious world of his day, a man who should leave the stamp of his goodness on the nation at large, and whose name should be as "a household word" in all pious families for ages to come? Had such a thing been predicted, men would have laughed the prophet to scorn as the idlest of dreamers. And yet all that and more came to pass. The youth at whose career we have glanced was John Newton, the friend of Cowper, the author along with him of the Olney Hymns, and the most venerable name among the evangelical clergy of the Church of England.

And to what did John Newton owe his rescue from the terrible pit into which he had fallen? His mother had died when he was only six years of age, and had been spared the misery of witnessing his career of vice, folly, and degradation. But she was a godly

woman, and during these six years she had stored his mind with divine truth, and her earnest prayers for him had gone up for a memorial before God. These early lessons, he himself records, *he never could get rid of*, even during the wildest part of his career. Do what he would, there they were, stamped indelibly on his soul, and ever and anon they would thrust themselves on his notice. And when at length his heart was softened, and his spirit bowed to seek the Lord, the words spoken by that gentle mother in the nursery, long years before, came sounding in his ears again, as words of power, and life, and purity. Imagine that mother's feelings when she heard of this! Imagine the meeting of that mother and her son in heaven, when, in a good old age, and after having done noble service in the Lord's vineyard, he entered into his rest!

Oh! mothers, mighty is your power for good or for evil over the children God has given you. Be entreated to be faithful to your high and solemn trust. Cease not the faithful, earnest, loving discharge of your peculiar work, as those to whom the religious

training of your own offspring is especially committed by God. Be instant in season and out of season, always abounding in this good work, assured that your work and labour of love shall not be in vain in the Lord. Thus shall the church of the future be sustained by those who have been nursed within the gates of the church that is. Thus shall the bulwarks of Zion be defended in coming days, by those whose youthful hands have been laid in solemn pledge upon her altars. Thus shall the succession of the godly be preserved in the earth. Thus one generation shall praise God's works unto another, and shall declare His mighty acts.



XIX.

THE GOD-MAN IN GLORY.

“ I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen.”—REV. i. 18.

DID it ever occur to the reader to attempt to realize the thought of some dear and valued friend coming back to earth after he had been a dweller in heaven, and speaking to us for our comfort and encouragement? If so, he will probably have tried to fancy *how* such an one would speak, and in what relation his speaking now, both in manner and substance, would stand to that which was wont to characterize him aforesaid while he was yet upon earth. He will have felt sure that the old familiar tones would be there, the old modes of expression, the old turns and forms of thought, all bespeaking the identity of the

speaker with his former self; and yet he will have felt no less sure that there would be a difference. Such an one would speak to us as one who had been within the veil; as one who had looked on things not to be described, and had heard things not to be uttered; as one who, no longer surrounded by danger and immersed in conflict, contemplated serenely the troubled aspect of things, and naturally spoke of earth as it appeared from the standpoint of heaven. There would be the same tone of tenderness and kindness, but it would be deeper and more thrilling; the same cast of thought, but with a larger and firmer grasp; the same readiness to direct his speech to our advantage by way of counsel or comfort, but the counsel would be far more earnest, and the comfort more joyous and triumphant. It would seem as if the majesty of eternity and the light of heaven had lent their influence to that once familiar voice—the same and yet another—rendering it at once more sweet and more sublime; not less kind and friendly, but more awful and impressive; and sending its accents down with a more thrilling impulse and a more potent energy into the soul.

Now what one may have thus fancied in relation to some dear departed friend, has in a measure been realized in the addresses which the exalted Redeemer uttered to His militant church after He had ascended to His throne. When these, as recorded especially in the book of Revelation, are compared with His addresses to His disciples as recorded in the Gospels, it is interesting to observe the resemblance and yet the difference of the two. There is the same ardent affection, the same tender care, the same wise counsel, the same holy doctrine; but the tone is more lofty, the accent more commanding, the sentiment more sublime. There is not less of love, but there is more of authority. It is still the "Man Christ Jesus" that speaks; but His language is no longer that of "the man of sorrows" addressed to the companions of His travel and the witnesses of His conflicts; it is the language of the laurelled conqueror, of the crowned Prince, of the Lord of the kings of the earth to His dependant followers and His pledged subjects. It is the same countenance of unequalled loveliness that was wont, when seen on earth, to draw the eyes of wondering

synagogues upon Him, and to move mothers to be ambitious to place their little babes in His arms, and to win the confidence of the sorrowful and the sin-burdened, and to shed a beam of unearthly radiance around the humble hearths of Capernaum and Bethany ; but there are no marks of sorrow on it now, no traces of tears, no wan and anxious lines ; " His eyes are as a flame of fire, and His countenance is as the sun shineth in his strength." That voice is still the same which spoke peace to the weeping penitent, and said to the timid suppliant, " Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee ;" but now, whilst its sweetness is unaltered, it is majestic and solemn " as the sound of many waters." To His persecuted and tried followers His language once was, " I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you : " Now it is, " 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."

These words of our Lord were addressed to the beloved disciple when he, overwhelmed with the manifestation which had been vouchsafed to him of the heavenly glory of the Re-

deemer, fell at His feet as one dead. John knew his Lord and recognized His voice ; but the splendour of His glorified body, the majesty of His appearance and utterance, and the glory of His heavenly state were more than the mortal organs of the Apostle could bear. Though more than any other he had shared in the human affection of his Lord ; though his head had been wont to rest on his Master's bosom ; and though in the familiarity of that privileged intercourse he could once ask questions of Christ which the other Apostles felt they could not ask ; yet now so altered were their relations that one sight of Christ was enough to fill John with awe and strike him to the dust. But mark now how Christ dealt with His servant under these circumstances. Having given him this striking manifestation of His heavenly glory, He might have withdrawn from further intercourse with him ; leaving this mysterious vision to work its natural effect on the mind and future life of His Apostle. Or if pleased to hold further intercourse with the latter, He might have veiled His celestial splendours and have appeared to him in a milder guise. Our

Lord did neither of these ; He still continued to speak to John, and He still appeared to him in all His glory. He neither broke off the conference nor abridged the splendours of His presence. What, then, did He do to meet the exigency of His servant ? He addressed him in the language of *love* and *encouragement* ; He raised His mind to sustain the grandeur of the revelation that had been made to him ; and He offered the assurance of this His heavenly glory as a ground for the confidence and joy of His servant to rest on : "Fear not ; I am He that liveth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen."

There thus emerges on our view one of those great truths which, though not formally and dogmatically stated in Scripture, are yet certainly contained there, and are among the hidden treasures which, to the patient and pious student of Scripture, are shewed by God in His law. It is this : that the glorified humanity of Christ in heaven is the source of encouragement and stimulus to His people amid the trials and conflicts of earth. Not to John only, but to all His people ; and not in refer-

rence to any one source of fear, but in reference to the whole of their spiritual conflict, Christ says, "Fear not : I am He that liveth and was dead : and behold I am alive for evermore."

Now, in order to apprehend this aright, let us bear in mind, that the position of the believer here is one of *conflict*. Christ, it is true, has called him to *peace* ; and in so far as he obeys Christ's call he obtains peace—"a peace which passeth all understanding." But this peace is peace with God—peace of conscience—peace in the prospect of judgment and eternity—peace in the order and harmony of a restored moral nature. It is not peace with sin. It is not peace with Satan. It is not peace with the empire of darkness. All these are the enemies of God and of Christ, and no man can enter into a covenant of peace with God through Christ, without finding himself by that very act placed in a position of antagonism to all the powers and principles of evil. Hence the Christian life is constantly compared to a warfare—a struggle—an agony, for which believers are to be constantly prepared, and in which they are steadfastly to persist. The condition of the Christian here is like that of the gla-

diator in the ancient amphitheatre : above him is the bright blue sky, bathed in unclouded sunshine, but around him are the noises, the confusion, and the perils of unsparing conflict.

Now, in order to carry on this conflict, the believer has need of constant encouragement and aid. His enemies are many ; their assaults constant and severe ; their resources great ; and he himself has but little strength and scanty means, and is, therefore, very apt to lose heart under the constant and severe pressure of his adversaries upon him. To meet the necessities of His people in this respect their great Lord and Master has made abundant provision ; and not the least potent of those encouragements which He has provided, is that suggested by the fact, that He himself in human nature—a nature so perfectly human that he died in it—yet lives and reigns in heaven, and shall live and reign for evermore.

In this mighty conflict to which the believer is called, there are two predominant forms of evil by which he is threatened, and which he must be aided to overcome—sin and

suffering. These two are closely connected. Sin is the cause of suffering—suffering the index of sin. And both, apart from a remedial and overmastering intervention of grace on the part of God, are under the power of the devil, who is the original author of all evil, physical and moral, that can reach man, for “by him sin entered the world, and death by sin;” both are made subservient to his designs; and both go to fill up the idea of that kingdom of darkness against which it is the constant struggle of the believer to defend himself. Now in respect of both these forms of evil with which the believer has to contend, the glorified humanity of Christ in heaven gives encouragement to him.

In the outset it may occur to the reflective inquirer to ask—“*How* came the Lord Jesus there ? By what path did he reach that summit of glory and felicity ? Was it one peculiar to himself, which no foot ever trod but his own ? Or was it one essentially the same as that by which we are summoned to go up to the heavenly Canaan ? And the answer which Scripture gives to this inquiry is such as to afford the greatest encouragement to us in our

pilgrimage. For the path which He trod is just the path we have to tread—the path of obedience, and conflict, and suffering. Is He not “the Captain of salvation made perfect through sufferings?” Did He not learn “obedience by the things which he suffered?” Was He not tempted of the devil? Was He not “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?” Was He not a sufferer—familiar with sorrow, acquainted with grief? Did He not suffer the pains of death, and submit to the humiliation of the grave?

Wherein, then, was his course essentially different from ours? It was not. The path to which we are called is that along which He has already passed. Behold how He has left us an example that we should follow his steps!—leaving the impress of his footsteps all along the path, that we might mark and follow. The gate through which we have to enter heaven is that through which He has already entered. The enemies we have to contend with are those whom He had to contend with and whom He conquered. Is there no encouragement, no stimulus to fainting souls in that? Does it not go to the heart of the

struggling, suffering believer, like the sound of a trumpet to the heart of the soldier, when his victorious leader, from the throne of his glory, says to him, “Fear not, I am he that liveth and was dead: and behold I am alive for evermore?”

It may occur, again, to the inquirer to ask, *Wherefore* is Jesus there? Why is his human nature exalted to the throne of heaven? Why did He not leave that body which He had assumed to moulder in the tomb, and return to heaven with the full splendour of that glory which He had with the Father before the world began? These are mighty questions, but Scripture enables us firmly and fearlessly to answer them. The glorified humanity of Christ is in heaven as the assurance of the acceptance of his work, as the memorial of the perpetual sufficiency of his one sacrifice, and as the pledge and promise of the final redemption of all who are his.

He is there *as the assurance of the acceptance of His work*. The work of Christ was the work which the Father had given him to do, and it was in human nature that he undertook to do it. *Did He do it?* When He said, “It is finished,”

was it really so? Was what He accomplished *all* that needed to be accomplished to render the forgiveness and acceptance of the sinner accordant with the righteousness and law of God? Questions these of immense importance! How can they be answered? We look up and see the answer on the throne of heaven. He who fills that throne is He who hung upon "the accursed tree." And He is there *because* He finished the work which the Father had given him to do. He was obedient unto death, "*wherefore* God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."*

Christ is in heaven in human nature *to attest the perpetual sufficiency of his one sacrifice.* Like the high priest of old He has gone within the veil with the blood of atonement in his hand; but as He hath not entered into a house made with hands, but into the heavens itself, the dwelling-place of God, he continues there, and hath an unchangeable priesthood. But an unchangeable priesthood implies a constant sacrifice; for a priest is nothing without his sacrifice. Where, then, is the constant sacri-

* Phil. ii. 9.

fice of Christ? The apostle tells us there is no such thing. He "needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. And now there is no more offering for sin."* The priesthood of Christ, then, has reference to this one sacrifice; and this sacrifice, to meet the demands of a perpetual priesthood, must possess a perpetual and unchanging efficacy. *Is* it so, then? We see the answer in the glorified humanity of Christ. That body which sits on heaven's throne is the body that was prepared for the sacrifice. It has been offered unto God as a living sacrifice. It never decays: it never becomes less sufficient. It abides there, the constant and confirmatory memorial of that propitiatory work which was accomplished on Calvary. And to all who have rested their hopes of pardon, acceptance, and final salvation on that sacrifice, Christ says, "Fear not; I am He that liveth and was dead: and, behold, I am alive for evermore."

* Heb. vii. 27; ix. 28; x. 18.

Christ is in heaven in glorified^r human nature, *as the pledge and promise of the final redemption of all that are his.* The apostle speaks of him as "the first-fruits of them that sleep." And He himself says, "Because I live ye shall live also." There is an inseparable connection between Him and His. He is the vine, they are the branches; He is the Head, and they are the body; He is the foundation, and they are the building. And this connection secures not only the full and constant supply of their need, but also a *participation* with him in his glory. As He is so shall they be; reigning as He reigns; glorified as He is glorified; blessed as He is blessed. Of all this his present glory is the pledge. Had He left his body to decay in the tomb, what would have sustained our hopes of a glorious resurrection? Had He returned and re-entered the invisible glory of the Eternal, what assurance would there have been for us that if we suffer with him we should also reign with him? But no; He has entered heaven in our nature. He has taken that nature to the throne. The powers and principalities of heaven have learned that He at whose name

they bow is linked by the closest and tenderest ties to the inhabitants of our distant globe. Already they regard us with wonder and with awe; and with ardent expectation await the time when the "joint-heirs with Christ" shall enter with him on the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom.

But this is not all. Our Lord is not only in the heavenly glory in our nature, but He is there in that nature to prosecute the work of our final redemption. In that nature He sits as a Priest upon his throne, and stands as a King at the altar. His is a royal priesthood; his a priestly kingdom. With him is the might of intercession and the right of conquest. He has entered heaven for us; He has won it as the reward of his sufferings on our behalf; He holds it, not in virtue of his Deity, but as the fruit of what He did in his humanity. Therefore it is that his glorified humanity is the most prominent object in the heavenly glory. What boundless comfort and encouragement is there in this to the afflicted and struggling believer! The King himself is of kin to us. The Priest in that heavenly temple is touched with a feeling of our infir-

mities. We are sure not only of his pity but of his sympathy. In his life and majesty we have the assurance that the mightiest agency in the universe, under the direction of the mightiest love, is constantly at work for our salvation.

How great, then, is the believer's comfort and encouragement! How boldly and joyfully may he pursue his path! With the most perfect of models to guide him; with the best and kindest of friends to help him; with a divine-human high priest to intercede for him; and with a divine-human king to direct and protect him, nothing but the most criminal negligence or cowardice on his part can prevent his success, or make him fall short of his aim. With holy boldness, then, may he gird up the loins of his mind, and go forward on his way strong in the Lord and confident of victory.



XX.

THE WALK THROUGH THE
VALLEY.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."—Ps. xxiii. 4.

THE Psalms, viewed in their literary aspect, are very much what we call now "occasional poems." Their authors did not set themselves to composition as a profession or a task; they did not say—"Go to, I will write a poem;" and so sit down and elaborate their given number of lines, according to such rules as belonged to their verse. Far from this: they sang because their hearts were full of music; and they usually caught their theme and their impulse from the circumstances that

were around them. It is to this we owe so much of the felt reality that vitalises their songs, and makes them find so ready a response in the bosoms of successive generations. Their notes are the genuine utterances of the heart in all its varying moods of joy and sorrow, perplexity and deliverance, trial and triumph; and hence they find a responsive echo in every bosom in which similar experience has awakened similar emotion.

In this 23d Psalm we see David, before he had assumed his royal dignity, and while he yet kept his father's flocks in the pastures around Bethlehem, ere God had taken him from the sheepfolds, to feed Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance. One can fancy him, in some shady nook, casting his eye over his flock feeding quietly around him; he sees them amid green pastures and beside quiet waters, and he feels thankful for the plenty and security they enjoy. But these privileges have been purchased to the flock by the shepherd's watchful care and courage. Danger is not far off, and these quiet pastures are embosomed amid horrors. Cross that rocky barrier and you are in a waste howling wilderness, where

the lion and the bear, and other beasts of prey, prowl. Not far off is the border land of Philistia, whence predatory bands are ever ready to burst in upon the pastoral districts, and carry devastation and death on every side. The time, besides, is a time of war, and David's elder brothers have carried their stalwart strength to the camp of Saul, leaving the defence of their patrimonial fields and property to the sling and the bow of their youthful brother. No wonder if, in such circumstances, the thought came up before David, "I keep, and lead, and protect my flocks, but who is to keep, and lead, and protect me?" And then across his quick-thoughted and associative mind there might pass the thought of life in general as a course of danger and difficulty, and of that higher and still more perilous course through which he had to pass in that moral life for whose exigencies and wants there were needed, even more than for this life, the care and sustenance of one higher than himself. Often do such questions press upon the minds of thoughtful and imaginative youths, as they stand gazing over the wide and doubtful scene of life, where they are to find, if anywhere,

their pasturage. Happy is it when, like David, they have found where their help is! Happy, when they know who it is that alone can safely keep and securely guide them along their perilous path! Happy when they can look up to Him who is the ever-present, the ever-powerful, the ever-gracious God, and say, "Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

"The valley of the shadow of death." Here is a picture. To realise it we must conceive a long narrow valley or glen, shut up on either side by impassable mountains, and along the base of which lies the path we have to travel. At the further end sits the giant form of death, grim, dark, repulsive, filling up the whole space; shutting out from the view the bright scenes that lie beyond; and projecting his gloomy shadow all down the valley, even to its very gorge. It is a picture of life, which is a journey onward into death. Within the skirts of that far-reaching shadow the infant enters with the first breath it draws,

and on, on, on ever deeper into the shadow must we travel, until the grim tyrant at length holds us in his arms and claims us as his prey. Our whole life is a walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

"The arrow that shall lay me low,
Was shot from Death's unerring bow
The moment of my birth,
And every footstep I proceed,
It tracks me with increasing speed;
I turn—it meets me!—Death
Hath given such impulse to that dart,
It points for ever at my heart."

Many regard the psalmist here as speaking in reference to a state he anticipated as sometime to befall him, when he should walk in the region of the shadow of death, *i. e.*, when he should be stretched upon his death-bed, and should see the last struggle as close upon him. But this is a mistaken view, an utter misapprehension of the figure here. The psalmist speaks of himself as *now* walking—"though I walk," not "may walk" or "should walk," or "when I come to walk," but though now, and all through my life, I am walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

The psalmist realized life as but a journey amid death's shadows. He felt he carried the sentence of death within him. The aches, and pains, and sicknesses that afflicted him; the sorrows, of which even in youth he had had a taste, and which he knew well would thicken around him as life advanced; all the vexations, and griefs, and disappointments, that embitter human life, and turn earth into a vale of tears;—what were they all to him but premonitions of mortality, shadows stretching forward from death, and seeking gradually to wrap him deeper and deeper in their embrace? And this, after all, is the true view of life. Life *is* a journey to the tomb—an easy or a toilsome, a speedy or a protracted, passage to the sepulchre. What is the first wail of childhood but nature's shudder as it enters the shadow? and when the old man gathers up his limbs into his bed and breathes out his last sigh, what is it but the quenching of that light which has been becoming dimmer and dimmer as that shadow gathered thicker and darker around it?

But whilst the psalmist thus realized life as a journey under the shadow of death, what

were the feelings with which he contemplated his course? Were they those of dismay and terror—of agitation and forboding? Hear him speak for himself, "I will not fear," says he. What words are these? This is not the language of nature in such circumstances. Nature shrinks back from death with horror and dismay. Nature, made for the light, abhors and dreads the shadow. It feels the dark gathering around it with fear and misgiving. It conjures up appalling spectres, and traces demoniac faces amid the gloom. It anticipates snares and pitfalls, precipices and crevices, at every step. It peoples every recess with monsters, and expects a devouring beast at every turn. "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon them." Doubt, uncertainty, foreboding, consume the soul; and man can find repose only by resolving to forget his true condition, or by deceiving himself with vain and false representations of life. When the reality presents itself to his view; when he is constrained to view life as a journey on to death; when some occurrence forces on him the recognition of the fact, that even in life the shadows of death are gathering

around him ; nature starts back in dismay, fear comes upon him, and trembling, so that all his bones shake. And yet here is one who, fully realizing all this, looking it seriously and earnestly in the face, smiles and says, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil."

Is this the language of enthusiasm and fanaticism ? It has no appearance of that ; it is too calm, too serene, too modest and moderate for that. To what then is it to be ascribed ? The psalmist himself informs us ; he renders a reason for his confidence ; he shews it is no idle empty boast ; he supports it with a "for," logically, rationally. "I will not fear *for* Thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they shall comfort me."

He had God's presence with him amid the shadows and up the valley. He gloried not in his wisdom, in his strength, or in his resources : he gloried only in the Lord. His was the religion of love, which saw God upon his side. His faith gave him an eye that could discern God even in the dark ; it was to him "the evidence of things not seen." And to the man that sees God with him and on his side,

what matters it how dark may be the air, and how rugged and perilous the way ? If I have perfect confidence in my guide I can proceed courageously though I see not an inch before me, and know not a foot of the road. The child may shudder as it finds itself in darkness, and may sit down in despondency and weep ; but let it hear its father's voice saying to it, "Child, take hold of my hand and I will guide you," and let it feel itself in that strong grasp, and its fears will quickly subside, and serenely it will follow, though it may be with unequal steps, whithersoever its father leads. Even so is it with the child of God. He knows not what lies before him, what a day or an hour may bring forth. All may be impenetrable darkness before and around him. But he knows that God is with him—with him to make the darkness light, and the crooked straight, and the rough places plain ; with him to give counsel in perplexity, strength in weakness, deliverance from danger, consolation in sorrow, and to make all things work together for his good. Is not this enough ? What has he to fear ? The way may be very dark to him ; but the darkness and the light

are both alike to God. The path may be very perplexed and intricate; but the unerring Counsellor is there to say, "This is the way, walk in it." There may be dangers and obstacles on every side; but He is with him who is a very present help in every time of trouble, and who will bear him up so that his foot shall not dash against a stone. The rod of the divine protection shall ward off from him all evil; the staff of the divine support shall sustain and guide him in every perplexity and over every difficulty.

A glance at these considerations shows us that David's boldness was well-founded. Youth as he was, he took a sober and just view of life on the one hand, and exercised a firm faith and a pious confidence in God on the other. In this lay the secret of his calm and manly courage. He did not affect to despise death, but neither did he fear it. He knew what life really was—a mere passage to the tomb, into the gathering shadows of which every day saw him enter farther; but he had no misgivings, nor did he indulge morose and morbid feelings in consequence. His mind was eminently well balanced, and weighed things justly and wisely.

And so he went singing on his way deeper and deeper into the gloom. How was this? He had faith in God; he stayed himself on God; and so was kept in perfect peace, because he trusted in Him. His step was firm and his bearing dauntless amid darkness, difficulty, and danger, because he laid hold of God, and went up leaning on Him whose grace was sufficient for him, and whose strength is made perfect in weakness.





XXI.

THE VISION BEYOND.

"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."—REV. vii., 9, 10.

IN the book of Revelation there are many things hard to be understood; many which even the most learned and the most skilful know not how to interpret. But interspersed with these are many things that are most simple and intelligible, that come home at once to the hearts, and fall in with the experience, and satisfy the longings of the humblest and simplest of the children of God.

In this respect it is like the great field of Nature, where there are dizzy heights which the strongest and most daring cannot scale, and at the same time pleasant nooks and sunny glades where the feeblest find shelter, and the most timid are at home.

Of these simpler and more intelligible passages, that before us is one. True, even it is not wholly within our apprehension, and subject to our intelligence. It relates to matters of which as yet we have no personal experience. It speaks of things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard." It opens to us scenes which are within the veil. It deals in matters which, to be understood fully, must be experienced. Still, there is no difficulty in apprehending *what* it is that is here presented to us, or in understanding correctly the truths here symbolized, however inadequate may be our conceptions of them. The vision with which the apostle was favoured on this occasion was a vision of heaven, as the gathering-place of the ransomed tribes of Israel, the home of the redeemed from amongst the sons of men, the resting-place of the weary, who had toiled and fought on

earth for Christ, and through the might of the Lamb had gotten the victory. The conflict is over. The din is hushed. The winds are held by the strong arm of angels, so that they blow not on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. No storm sweeps over earth's surface, composed at length to serene repose. Not a wave disturbs the mirror of ocean, spread out in sheeny calm. Not a leaf flutters on the foliaged trees. The Sabbath of the world has come; Paradise is again restored. And now, amid the universal hush of nature, the Lamb musters His hosts, and counts His servants, and puts His seal upon their foreheads. The Apostle gazes as the mighty throng passes to the muster. He sees them gather from every land and from every tribe. Martyrs are there who have not counted their lives dear unto them that they might win Christ. Confessors are there who have stood firm by their testimony for Christ amid good report and bad report. Patriarchs, apostles, and prophets are there, each with his starry crown, followed by a faithful band. Men of every age and every clime are there; God's sons come from far, and his daughters

from the ends of the earth. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of vision!" The Apostle tries to count them as they pass, but the attempt is vain. As band after band of the white-robed immortals hastens on, he feels that human arithmetic is impotent to express their numbers. He can but point to them as they stand, rank beyond rank, stretching far as his illuminated vision can reach, and exclaim, "Lo! a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

It is but little at the best that we can realize of so transcendent a scene, but that little it is worth our while to secure, to retain, and to profit by. There are two things which especially command attention in reading this verse.

The first thing that strikes one is the *multitude of the redeemed in heaven*. John saw "a great multitude which no man could

number;" and John did not see the whole, or saw it only in prophetic anticipation. Since his time how many have joined that company! How many more have yet to join it ere time shall end! Heaven is constantly receiving accessions to the number of its inmates. Not an hour passes but some happy spirit reaches the golden gates, and enters into the palace of heaven with everlasting joy upon its head.

"A great multitude which no man can number!" It was not always so. This great multitude has grown by degrees through the lapse of ages. Time was when no being of the human race dwelt in heaven. Angels and seraphim, principalities and powers, were there, thousands upon thousands; but as yet no child of earth had mingled with their adoring bands. And then at length one solitary spirit entered. Escaping from its mangled frame, it hastened up to Him who gave it, and passing through the shining hosts of heaven, bent meekly and humbly before the eternal throne. Surely there was wonder in heaven when that took place. A new thing had come to pass. A being of a new race had taken his place among the immortals.

Oh! with what joy would he be welcomed by those blessed spirits which, with the unsullied purity, partake also in the unmixed benevolence of God! How would they gather round him! With what fond inquiry would they draw from him his spiritual history! How eagerly would they teach him the wonders of that region to which he had come! And yet, methinks, he could not but feel somewhat solitary even amidst the tender offices of these blessed spirits. They were not of his race; their experience was not his. He could not share their sympathy, however he might enjoy their benevolence. A man, he was not complete when cut off from humanity. But he had not long to wait. "The righteous Abel" soon stood at the head of a goodly company. Death was too greedy of his prey to suffer the human race, which sin had made over to him, long to escape his stroke. One after another felt his power; one after another, through his ministry, followed into heaven. Who came first? We cannot tell. Very likely it was some little babe, for they ever die most numerously. What if it was a child of Cain? Possibly it might; and if so, oh!

what rapture to the saintly Abel to welcome, as his first companion in glory, the child of his murderer, and, in loving embrace, to seal to the child his forgiveness of the wrong he had received from the father. But apart from such conjectures, this we know, that ere long the lonely one had companions in heaven, and from that time to this the blessed company has still been increasing, and still will it increase until heaven is filled with those for whom it was prepared from before the foundations of the world.

“A great multitude which no man can number!” It is well to contemplate this, and be impressed by it; for now, as always, the good have the minority in the world, and the wicked the majority. The disciples once asked the Lord, “Are there few that shall be saved?” and the Lord answered them by telling them to leave such questions, and take heed to their own salvation. But this implicit rebuke was called forth rather by the spirit in which the question was put, than by anything wrong in the question itself. It is a question which, not in mere idle curiosity, but in deep earnestness of soul, one may put,

can hardly help putting. Are there few that shall be saved? Shall the mass of the lost at last exceed the company of the saved? Shall more of our race go down as trophies to the power of the prince of darkness, than Christ shall carry with Him to heaven as the purchase of His blood? Who can forbear putting such questions?

To these questions Scripture gives no direct answer; but there are certain considerations which lead us to conclude that the number of the saved shall at last largely exceed the number of the lost.

I. As final perdition is the penalty of sin, and redemption is the fruit of grace, there is reason to believe that as grace is mightier than guilt, the results of the working of grace will far exceed the results of the working of guilt. Sin has abounded, but grace, we know, superabounds. Not as the offence is the free gift, but greatly beyond it. In the conflict, then, between the two, surely it is the mightier that shall prevail. Besides, has not God expressly declared, “that in the ages to come He is to shew forth the *exceeding riches* of His

grace?" He has shewn to us that grace already in a marvellous manner. There is a display of grace in the sparing of our race, in the gift of His Son, in the acceptance of His sacrifice for us, in the offer of salvation, in the salvation of a single soul, in the preservation of the world ; but all these come short of exhibiting that grace in its fulness and richness. It is in the lapse of the ages—as the work of conversion goes on, that this grace is to develop itself, and its "exceeding riches" are to be displayed. Is there not ground here for believing that the triumphs of grace shall far far transcend the desolations of sin ?

II. It is remarkable, that whilst the Bible often speaks of the vast number of the saved, it nowhere dwells on the multitude of the lost. How is this? Is it because the former is the pleasanter theme of the two? *Partly*, perhaps, for this; but not wholly. Is it not rather to leave on our minds the impression that the number of the former so immensely shall exceed that of the latter, as to throw it, so to speak, into the background? In connection with this, may be taken our Lord's

representations in His parables as to the relative proportion of the two. Sometimes He represents the two as equal, as in the parable of the virgins, where five were wise, five were foolish. Oftener the good exceed the bad, as in the parable of the servants, of whom two were good and faithful, and only one wicked and unprofitable; or in that of the marriage supper, which was crowded with guests, and where only one was found without the wedding garments; or in the comparison of the righteous to sheep, the wicked to goats, the former of which are always the majority in a flock. It would not do to build minutely on these representations; yet surely they leave on the mind the pleasant impression that the number of the good, the approved, the righteous, shall at last exceed that of the bad, the condemned, the finally lost.

III. We are not in circumstances to judge from surrounding facts of how it will be in the end of the world. There are three things which we do not know, but which enter very materially into this calculation. In the *first* place, we know not the number of those who,

having received no revelation of the Gospel, have yet lived and died so as to be accepted by God on the ground of the Saviour's merit. Paul tells us that they that are without law shall not be judged by the law, but by such light as they have ; and Peter assures us that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with God.* Here, then, is an element of which we can form no estimation. There may be few such ; there may be none ; there may be many ;—we cannot tell. In the *second* place, we know not the proportion which those who die in infancy bear to those who grow up and die impenitent. All the former are to be claimed for the redeemed, and, as their numbers are very great, the probability is that they vastly exceed the whole number of those who grow up to be adults ; at any rate, so long as we are in ignorance of the relative proportion of these we are not in a condition to tell now what the final result will be. And the *third* thing we know not is the numbers that shall be gathered in to Christ in the later ages of the world when the “knowledge of the Lord shall fill

* Rom. ii. 11-16 ; Acts x. 35.

the earth as the waters cover the sea,” and “all shall know him from the least unto the greatest.” How long this shall last we cannot tell. What numbers shall during that period be so turned to the Lord we know not. But, clearly, without knowing this, it is impossible for us to come to any certain conclusion as to the ultimate proportion of the saved to the lost. The presumption, however, unquestionably is, that the number of the former will vastly exceed that of the latter.

Christians may be of good cheer, then, and lift up their heads with gladness. The tables of heaven shall be furnished with guests. The many mansions in the house of the Father shall all be occupied. They shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and the south, and fill the place prepared for them. The blessed of the Lord shall be gathered from all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues. In august assembly shall they meet. In shining clouds shall they be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The spotless church ! the holy Jerusalem ! The bride, the Lamb's wife, arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, glorious in her

apparel, transcendent in her beauty ; with gladness and rejoicing, she is brought, and enters into the king's palace ! The Lord has redeemed her for Himself, and her name shall be remembered for ever and ever.

The other thing which cannot fail to strike one in this description is *the community of position, character, and occupation, of this innumerable host*. They stand all on one ground "before the Lamb ;" they all wear one attire—"clothed in white robes, and having palms in their hands ;" and they all sing one song—saying "salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

This community exists amid diversity. These blessed ones are not in all respects the same. They have different degrees of glory. They are endowed with different capacities of service. They engage in different spheres of occupation. "Star differeth from star in glory." Some who while on earth sowed sparingly, now reap sparingly ; while others, who "laid up a good foundation for the time to come," now find their treasure secure, and receive their own with usury. Some are princes over five cities, some over only two. Some have

but five talents, others have ten. Some have their mansions in the uppermost rooms of the house, while others find their fitting place hard by the door of entrance. Some have had an "abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom," and stand high amidst its magnates ; others have been "saved with difficulty, as by fire," and are lost with wonder to find that heaven has any place for them at all. But amid all this diversity, and much beyond this, of which we know nothing now, there are three grand points of community—the position they occupy, the character they sustain, the song they sing, are one.

And how is this ? Because they have all been redeemed by the same blood, they have all been purified by the same grace, they have all entered heaven by the same door, they have all been accepted on the same ground. Not one of them entered heaven without Christ. The martyr did not purchase heaven by his endurance, nor the confessor by his fortitude, nor the apostle by his services, nor the babe by its innocence. When the question was asked, "Who are these arrayed in white robes ?" the reply was, "These are

they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore it is that they stand before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.* Their place is the place of loving proximity; their attire is the attire of beseeeming propriety; their song is the song of grateful adoration and admiring praise. They owe all to Christ, and therefore they stand near Him; they wear the robes in which He has invested them; and they cease not to praise Him, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."†

Into these things it becomes us to look with earnest believing gaze. They have been revealed to us for our comfort. Earth is the domain of death. It is full of graves. It is a vale of tears. "Friend after friend departs." Families are torn asunder, churches lose member after member, pastor after pastor. "We have here no continuing city." We live in tents, and each day we strike our tent to

* Rev. vii. 13, 14.

† Rev. v. 12.

move a stage farther on towards that "bourne whence no traveller returns." But none of these things need grieve us. "Heaven is our home." We are journeying thither, and the loved ones we have lost are there. All the past worth and excellence of the church on earth is there. Of those who gave themselves to Christ not one is lost. We shall receive our dead again. Let us now be in sympathy and communion with them as they stand before the throne. Their Saviour is ours; let their character be that to which we aspire; let us offer at their song. Thus shall we gradually become assimilated to them, insensibly ascend to their elevation, and, ere long, fall into their ranks.



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